

AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR OF 1939-1945

SERIES TWO

NAVY

VOLUME I

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY, 1939-1942

AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR OF 1939-1945

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ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY

1939-1942

by

G. HERMON GILL

CANBERRA
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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PREFACE

THE naval volume of the *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18* was concerned with the activities and achievements of an infant navy. This volume and its successor are concerned with the activities and achievements of the same navy, but one grown from infancy to youth and well on the way to maturity. The infant navy of the earlier war was conceived from a union of ideas. From the earliest days of British settlement in Australia, its people have been reminded at intervals of their dependence upon sea communications, and of the importance to them of sea power. On the morning of the 24th January 1788, within a few hours of the arrival at Botany Bay of Captain Phillips' First Fleet bringing with it Australia's original settlers, there was considerable alarm in the ships at the appearance of two strange vessels in the offing standing in for the land. It was thought that they were hostile Dutch frigates sent to dispute the British landings. Actually they were the French ships of La Perouse. Relations were friendly, and there was no trouble. It was, however, the first of a series of alarms which impressed the Australian mind, and which to an extent influenced the development of the Australian defence policy on the lines it followed up to the outbreak of the second world war.

The victory of Trafalgar in 1805 secured British control of the sea and ushered in the long period of the Pax Britannica. During the first half of the nineteenth century no threat to Australia appeared. Daily the sun rose over peaceful Pacific waters, and often gilded the masts and spars of ships of the British East Indian squadron, lying in Port Jackson. Australia then formed part of the East Indian station, whose flag officer controlled the movements of these ships. In times of peace they offered comforting assurance of protection. But the Australian authorities knew that in time of war they would probably sail off over the encircling horizon to duties elsewhere, leaving the Australian coast, in appearance at any rate, undefended.

In 1859 (by which time ripples from the distant Crimea had broken on Australian shores, producing a mild scare which constrained New South Wales and Victoria each to acquire a small armed ship for local defence) the Australia station was constituted as a separate Imperial naval command independent of the East Indian station. The position, however, remained unchanged regarding the ships there based. They formed an Imperial squadron whose duty was not only to provide for the defence of the Colonies, but, in time of war, to escort treasure ships sailing for England, accompanying them as far as either the Cape of Good Hope or the Horn, both a long way from Australia. The urge grew for Australian-controlled ships for local defence, in addition to those of the Royal Navy.

There was a natural clash of views between the Imperial and Colonial governments on this question. The Imperial authorities correctly premised

that because the seas are one the fleet should be one. They held that the successful conduct of war at sea demanded one central control of naval forces, and that the best contribution by the colonies would be a subsidy. The Australian authorities, while accepting the premise and being willing and eager to contribute their share towards the defence of sea communications and to their own local defence, understandably wished to have some say in that defence and in the dispositions of the forces to which they contributed. Fortunately there was give and take on both sides, though each had its die-hards. The Australians saw the wisdom in the Imperial argument; the British government and the Admiralty were sympathetic towards Australian aspirations. A continuing and progressive compromise, speeded by the march of events and the increasing threat from growing rivals to Britain's naval supremacy, provided the solution. During the colonial period the way was paved for Australia's naval development by the Governments of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia (in part impelled by war alarms overseas) establishing their own small naval forces for local defence, under the immediate wing of the Imperial squadron and the overall protection of the far distant British battle fleet. With Australian federation in 1901, and the establishment of a Commonwealth Government responsible for Australian defence, the substitution of ships and men for a subsidy, and of an Australian squadron for the Imperial squadron on the Australia station, became possible.

Thus the infant Australian navy of the first world war was conceived, from a union of British and Australian ideas fused by a compromise which produced a practical plan. In 1909, after ideas and proposals had been exchanged for some years, the Admiralty suggested that Australia should acquire a self-contained fleet unit, owned by Australia and controlled and administered by the Australian Government through the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board. Its composition should be such that, while manageable (within the Australian budget) in time of peace, and capable of effective independent operation as a balanced force in time of war, it could also be used as a component part or, divided, as component parts, of other forces under Admiralty control. The fleet unit, acquired by Australia in the years immediately preceding the first world war, consisted of one battle-cruiser, three light cruisers, six destroyers and two submarines, with the necessary auxiliaries. The original intention was that this fleet unit should be one of three forming an "Eastern" or "Pacific" fleet of the British Empire; but events overtook plans (as was to happen again in the period of which this volume tells) and only the Australian unit materialised. There is interest in the parallel between this British "Fleet unit" conception of 1909, a self-contained fast striking force built around a battle cruiser, and that of the American "Task force" of 1941, built around an aircraft carrier.

There were four main essentials to the success of the fleet unit conception. To meet natural Australian ambitions, its ships had to be owned and controlled by Australia, and manned as far as possible by Australian officers and seamen. Because its main value at all times would be its constant and instant readiness to cooperate with the Royal Navy, either as a separate squadron or as a component part or parts of other forces, its regulations had to resemble the *King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions*, and the standard of training, discipline and general efficiency in ships, officers, and men, had to be maintained on an equality with that of the Royal Navy. As a corollary, it was most desirable that, so far as was possible, there should be joint training with H.M. Ships. And finally, there must be a readiness on the part of the Australian Government and people to transfer strategic and tactical control of the squadron or of units thereof to the Admiralty in time of war.

These essentials were met. Because of lack of training it was not possible at the outset to man the ships entirely with Australians, and throughout the first world war the proportions were approximately 80 per cent R.A.N. and 20 per cent R.N. officers and men. Training centres were, however, established in Australia on the British model, a naval college for embryo officers and a training ship (later establishment) for ratings, and the gap was virtually closed in the years between the wars. In its governing regulations, its methods and standards of training, discipline, and general conduct, the R.A.N. has adhered closely to the R.N. pattern; and the desired standard of equality with the older navy has at all times been maintained. Joint training in peace time was not easy to arrange, but whenever opportunity offered, with the visit of a British squadron to Australian waters, combined exercises were carried out; and a program of cruiser exchange, though interrupted by economic difficulties, gave valuable results. There was also a continuous interchange of officers, petty officers, and men, which is of great benefit to both navies.

As to unified control in time of war, Australia accepted in principle the theory that the indivisibility of the seas demanded, as far as possible, an undivided naval control. The basis of the naval defence of Australia remained fundamentally unchanged from the days of earliest settlement—local responsibility for the Australia station (first as part of the East Indian station) and ultimate dependence on the integrity of world wide sea communications. The instrument guaranteeing this integrity was the power radiating from the British battle fleet outwards through the squadrons and ships of the various naval stations, of which the Australia station was one. Australia recognised that it might be necessary in war to concentrate power by reinforcing one station at the expense of others and, to meet that contingency, agreed in both world wars (though not without occasional rightful criticism) to transfer control of the squadron, or of individual ships, to the Admiralty. It is again of interest that this recogni-

tion of a vital principle and readiness to act according to it was an example in unity of naval command followed (after some expensive fumbling) by the Allies during the second world war. It was a concomitant of victory.

Australian acceptance of the theory of the indivisibility of the seas, and the consequent need for unified control of naval forces, has greatly widened the scope of this history. Australian ships formed part of British (and later of Allied) naval forces in widely separated areas. Their movements and activities were determined by a variety of influences in both the political and military fields, and emanating from Australian, British, Allied, and enemy sources. Because of this it has been necessary largely to sketch in the pattern of the whole war, politically, economically, geographically and militarily, on a world background; and against this to trace the Australian naval story in as great detail as practicable. Only so could any attempt be made to preserve a just proportion in depicting the part of the Australian navy in relation to the whole. To discuss and determine the influence of sea power on the progress and outcome of the war; the way that power was wielded by the respective participants; and the contribution made by Australia through the Royal Australian Navy, is the object of this work.

All available sources of information have been drawn upon without restraint, and the author has been given generous assistance in all quarters where it was sought. Sources include records of the Australian War Cabinet and Advisory War Council, and of the Admiralty and the Australian Naval Board; reports of commanders-in-chief and of commanding officers of individual ships; the war diaries and letters of proceedings of ships and establishments; personal notes and written or verbal accounts of experiences; and Allied and enemy documents. Recourse has also been made to published works, reference to which is, in each instance, recorded in footnotes. The author has been untrammelled by censorship, and given complete freedom in comment and the expression of opinion, for which he alone is responsible.

This book has been written for the general reader rather than for the naval expert, so that technicalities, excepting those widely and readily understood, have been avoided as far as possible; and sometimes terms running counter to professional practice have been used. For example, courses and bearings have been given in compass points instead of in degrees.

Reference is made above to the assistance received in general. In particular, the author is indebted to a number of individuals who have given him much of their time and thought, and much encouragement. It is not possible to over-estimate his indebtedness to Mr Gavin Long, the General Editor of the series of histories of which this is a part. He has been a never-failing inspiration; a most forbearing editor, offering sympathetic understanding of problems, stimulating comment, and wise

advice. Of Mr Long's efficient and ever-helpful staff, Mr John Balfour has been a painstaking assistant, notably in putting the many necessary final touches to the typescript to make it ready for the printer, and in preparing biographical footnotes. Mr Hugh Groser has added greatly to the value of the book with his excellent charts; and Miss Mary Gilchrist has smoothed the path with many thoughtful secretarial attentions. In the field of research, valuable help was received from Mr H. H. Ellmers and his staff in the records section of the Admiralty; from Commander Geoffrey Rawson, who for some months acted in London as a personal link with the Admiralty; and from Mr J. M. Luke, officer-in-charge of Naval Historical Records, Navy Office, Melbourne, and members of his staff, especially Mr J. K. Ware and Mr L. G. Norman. A most necessary contribution was made by Mr L. I. Parker, whose arduous task was the preparation of the index. Much encouraging help, by precept and example, was received from fellow authors of the histories.

Most valuable comments and suggestions have been given by those upon whose forbearance, knowledge and experience, the author has drawn as readers of his draft chapters. A careful reading and checking against records was done by Mr Luke and his staff at Navy Office. All the chapters were read by members of the Historical Staff at the Admiralty, who checked them for factual accuracy in matters concerning ships and operations of the Royal Navy, with extremely useful results. The late Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin read Chapters 1 to 11 inclusive, and his penetrating comment was of the greatest help. His death terminated a kindly service and robbed the author of a wise mentor and esteemed friend. All the chapters have been read with diligent scrutiny by Commander R. B. M. Long, R.A.N. (Retd), who most kindly broke into his too-limited leisure to study them, and whose sage counsel has been of inestimable benefit. A number of others generously read small portions which they were peculiarly qualified to discuss. Finally, the author is indebted beyond measure to his wife, who uncomplainingly listened to his reading of the developing volume in and out of season, and who always encouraged him with pertinent criticism and thoughtful suggestions.

The author himself had some years sea experience as an apprentice and deck officer in the British Merchant Service. The 1914-18 war years, spent wholly at sea, made him familiar with many of the scenes of this history, in particular the Mediterranean, the Aegean, the Persian Gulf, the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and the Australia station, under war conditions—even though they lacked the intensity of the conditions in the war with which this history deals. He settled on shore in Australia in the nineteen-twenties, and joined the Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve while practising as a journalist, and as a writer largely on nautical matters. He was mobilised when war broke out in 1939, and spent most of the war in the Naval Intelligence Division, where his work,

though mainly in Navy Office, Melbourne, took him all over Australia, to New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and finally, on historical research, to naval headquarters at Colombo, Alexandria, the Admiralty, and the United States of America.

G.H.G.

*Middle Park,
Melbourne,
25th March 1957.*

CHRONOLOGY

Events described in this volume are printed in italics

- | | | |
|------|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1921 | 13 Dec | <i>Four Power Treaty signed between British Commonwealth, U.S.A., France and Japan. (Anglo-Japanese Alliance ended)</i> |
| 1922 | 6 Feb | <i>Washington Naval Treaty signed between British Commonwealth, U.S.A., Japan, France and Italy</i> |
| 1930 | 22 Apr | <i>London Naval Treaty signed between Washington Treaty Powers</i> |
| 1935 | 18 Jun | <i>Anglo-German Naval Agreement signed</i> |
| 1936 | 25 Mar | <i>Second London Naval Treaty concluded between British Commonwealth, U.S.A., France. (Japan and Italy failed to adhere)</i> |
| 1938 | 29 Sep | <i>Munich Agreement signed between Britain, Germany, France and Italy</i> |
| 1939 | 22 May | <i>"Pact of Steel" (Axis) between Italy and Germany</i> |
| | 1 Sep | <i>Germans invade Poland</i> |
| | 3 Sep | <i>Britain and France declare war on Germany. R. G. Menzies broadcasts that Australia is at war</i> |
| 1940 | 9 Jan | <i>First A.I.F. contingent embarks</i> |
| | 10 May | <i>Mr Churchill becomes Prime Minister of U.K.</i> |
| | 10 Jun | <i>Italy declares war</i> |
| | 12 Jun | <i>H.M.A.S. "Manoora" intercepts Italian ship "Romolo"</i> |
| | 22 Jun | <i>France signs armistice terms with Germany</i> |
| | 19 Jul | <i>H.M.A.S. "Sydney" sinks Italian cruiser "Bartolomeo Colleoni"</i> |
| | 27 Sep | <i>Tripartite Pact: Germany, Italy and Japan</i> |
| | Oct-Nov | <i>German raider "Penguin" lays mines off Australia</i> |
| | 11-12 Nov | <i>Battle of Taranto</i> |
| 1941 | 28 Mar | <i>Battle of Cape Matapan</i> |
| | Mar-Apr | <i>6th Australian Division arrives in Greece</i> |
| | 22 Apr | <i>Embarkation of troops from Greece begins</i> |
| | 25-27 Apr | <i>Australian and New Zealand units from Greece arrive in Crete</i> |
| | 1 Jun | <i>Embarkation from Crete completed</i> |
| | 8 Jun | <i>Allied invasion of Syria opens</i> |
| | 22 Jun | <i>Germans invade Russia</i> |

	7 Oct	Mr Curtin becomes Prime Minister of Australia
	19 Nov	<i>H.M.A.S. "Sydney" sunk in action with German raider</i>
	7-8 Dec	<i>Japanese attack Malaya and Pearl Harbour</i>
	8 Dec	Australia at war with Japan 5 p.m.
	10 Dec	<i>H.M.S. "Prince of Wales" and H.M.S. "Repulse" sunk</i>
1942	16 Jan	Formation of Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee
	23 Jan	<i>Japanese force attacks Rabaul</i>
	15 Feb	Singapore surrendered to Japanese forces
	19 Feb	<i>First Japanese air raid on Darwin</i>
	27 Feb	<i>Battle of Java Sea</i>
	17 Mar	General MacArthur arrives in Australia

CHAPTER 1

BETWEEN THE WARS

BETWEEN 1919 and 1939 profound economic and geographic changes affected both the Australian nation and its navy; Australia's development, accelerated by war, was continued in a post-war world beset by problems which imposed increased and widened responsibilities.

As early as the Imperial Conference of 1911, the implications of the birth and growing strength of naval forces in the Dominions had been stressed by the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey. He said that, if the action of fighting forces in different parts of the Empire were determined by divergent views about foreign policy, the Empire would not consent to share the resulting liability, the risks of which it could not gauge; and that "the creation of separate fleets has made it essential that the foreign policy of the Empire should be a common policy". One of the first fruits of this conclusion was that the Dominion Ministers were consulted at this Conference before the renewal for ten years of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the original treaty having been entered into in 1902 and the renewal effected in 1905 without previous concurrence by the Dominions.

After the 1914-18 war came recognition of equality of status as between all the partners of the British Commonwealth. Speaking of the Dominions at the 1921 Imperial Conference, the British Prime Minister, Mr Lloyd George, said: "They have attained full national status, and they now stand beside the United Kingdom as equal partners in the dignities and responsibilities of the British Commonwealth." This new status, with the later recognition that it was for the parliaments of the several parts of the Empire upon the recommendations of their respective governments to decide the nature and extent of any warlike action which should be taken by them,¹ was to exercise an influence in Australia's naval policy.

On the economic side large war debts had been incurred, and a pruning of defence expenditure was considered necessary to economic recovery, especially in Britain. There was a demand that governments spend money on improving social conditions rather than on armaments. It was accepted that the defence of the Empire depended on the British Navy. But although, at the end of the war in 1918, Britain occupied a greater pre-eminence over European powers than at any previous time and her navy ranked ahead of those of the United States and Japan, she was no longer in the strong position she had hitherto employed.

With the end of the war in sight, British capital ship construction had ceased except that Britain went on building the big battle cruiser *Hood*.² This was to have been one of four, but work on the other three was

¹ Resolution No. 2, Imperial Conference, 1923.

² HMS *Hood*, battle cruiser (1920), 42,100 tons, eight 15-in and twelve 5.5-in guns, 31 kts; sunk by German battleship *Bismarck*, Denmark Strait, 24 May 1941.

stopped in October 1918, the contracts later being cancelled. Immediate post-war estimates made no provision for building warships, and not until 1921 were tenders for four capital ships invited.

Both the United States and Japan, on the contrary, had considerable building programs in hand, started in 1916 and making good progress. The new American and Japanese capital ships were to mount 16-inch guns, whereas *Hood* was the only post-Jutland ship in the British fleet, where the heaviest gun mounted was the 15-inch. By 1924 Britain would possess only fourteen first-class battleships, totalling 336,350 tons to the twenty-one of 722,000 tons under the American flag, while Japan would have eight of 252,000 tons; Britain would have four battle cruisers with the heaviest guns, of 121,000 tons, to the six of the United States of 261,000 tons; the Japanese would possibly have six completed in 1924 and had, moreover, decided soon to lay down eight capital ships.

Anxiety about the decline of British naval power was reflected in Australia, a reflection sharpened by the fact that it was obvious that the centre of naval strategy now lay in the Pacific, and there were indications that the Pacific might be the scene of the next world war, a naval race having developed between the United States and Japan, each of whose fleets had carried out large-scale manoeuvres in Pacific waters. With the United States, Australia, in common with the rest of the British Empire, was on terms of the closest international friendship. With Japan, Britain had a Treaty of Alliance to which Australia was a partner. Some friction had, however, arisen between Australia and Japan on the question of the White Australia policy. Moreover, the two countries were now much closer neighbours than before as a result of the allocation under mandate of the former German colonies, Japan having been granted those islands north of the equator, while Australia had those to the south. As was stated during the course of debate on the Peace Treaty in the House of Representatives on 17th September 1919, "Australia has taken its frontiers northward to Rabaul, but the frontier of Japan has been brought southward 3,000 miles to the equator, until their front door and our back door almost adjoin".

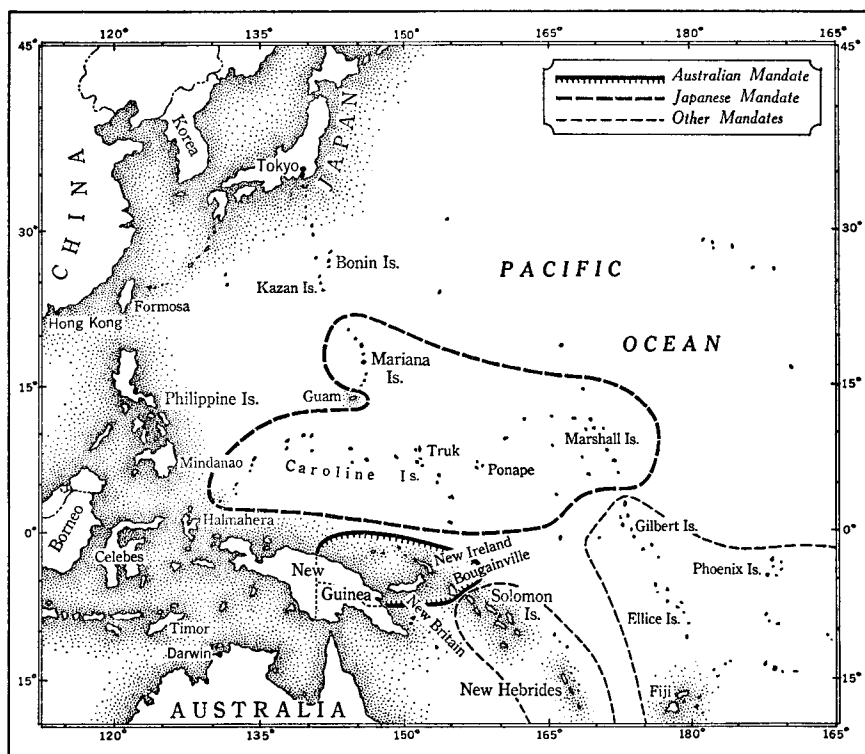
At this stage the Commonwealth Government was basing its naval policy on the advice contained in the Henderson³ "Recommendations" of 1911. The consideration that this policy might require reviewing in the light of war experience and the post-war situation led to the Government's inviting the Admiralty to send out a naval authority to survey and report on the whole question of naval defence. Admiral of the Fleet Lord Jellicoe⁴ was selected, and arrived in Australia in May 1919, remaining three months before returning to England by way of New Zealand and Canada. The results of his survey were embodied in his "Report on the Naval Mission to the Commonwealth", which was submitted to the Governor-General in August 1919, and in which great stress was laid upon the

³ Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson, GCB; RN. B. Worth, Kent, Eng, 20 Nov 1846. Died 12 Jul 1932.

⁴ Admiral of Fleet Earl Jellicoe, GCB, OM, GCVO; RN. Comd Grand Fleet, 1914-16; Ch of Naval Staff, 1917; Governor-General of New Zealand, 1920-24. B. 5 Dec 1859. Died 20 Nov 1935.

importance of close collaboration with the Royal Navy, to be achieved by strict adherence to Royal Naval procedure and methods of administration, and by the constant interchange of officers of the two navies. Strategically, the Jellicoe report envisaged the creation of a large Far Eastern Imperial Fleet, including capital ships and aircraft carriers,⁵ and the establishment of a major base at Singapore. The proportions of the cost of this fleet would be based on the population and value of overseas trade of Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand, in the proportions:

Great Britain . . .	75% (£ 14,778,525)
Australia . . .	20% (£ 3,940,940)
New Zealand . . .	5% (£ 985,235)



In suggesting the types of ships proposed for the Australian unit, three considerations were taken into account: their suitability for Australian local defence; their adaptability as units of the Far Eastern Fleet; their value for training Australians in the working of all types of vessels making up a large, balanced fleet. Allowing for these factors the report proposed

⁵ A similar proposal had been advanced by the Admiralty in 1909, but failed to fructify owing to developments in Europe and the need to concentrate British capital ship strength in the North Sea. But out of it the Royal Australian Navy was born. See A. W. Jose, *The Royal Australian Navy, 1928* (Vol IX, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18*, pp. xxx et seq), and the Preface to this volume.

an Australian fleet comprising two battle cruisers, eight light cruisers, one flotilla leader, twelve destroyers, one destroyer depot ship, eight submarines, one parent submarine ship, one minelayer, two sloop minesweepers, two special reserve sloop minesweepers, one aircraft carrier, and one fleet repair ship. The annual cost of maintenance and depreciation of this fleet was estimated at £4,024,600. Recommendations were made regarding provision of naval bases in Australia, measures to improve administration, the provision of oil fuel, wireless communication, an efficient naval reserve organisation and coastguard service, and the appointment of Directors of Naval Intelligence, Torpedoes and Mines, and Naval Reserves and Mobilisation.

Summing up the naval situation in the Far East, and outlining Japan's existing and potential naval strength, Jellicoe stated that a rising tide of ill-feeling against Britain—which was evident during the war—was reported in Japan, and that danger of invasion of Australia would exist as long as the White Australia policy remained in force. Japan had ordered eight modern battleships, whereas Britain was building no battleships, and had none in existence quite equal in power, ship for ship, to the Japanese forces. If Japan were to declare war, it would be probable that she should do so by means of a sudden surprise assault, similar to her attack on Port Arthur in the Russo-Japanese war.

Nothing was done to carry out any of the major recommendations in the report, with the exception of that regarding close collaboration with the Royal Navy and the means of achieving it. Certain of the subsidiary suggestions were adopted, including the winding up of the Naval Brigade and the reorganisation of the Citizen Forces, and the appointment of Directors of Naval Intelligence, Torpedoes and Mines, and Reserves and Mobilisation. Action had already been taken by the Naval Board to build up an organisation which would take the place in Australia of the Coastguard Service in Britain.⁶ The Naval Board was reconstituted, its functions and responsibilities being clearly defined. The existing constitution of the Board, as laid down in *Statutory Rule No. 32* of 3rd March 1911, was—according to Rear-Admiral Grant,⁷ First Naval Member—"so vague that no one, not even the Members of the Board themselves, understand what is conveyed or meant by the word 'Board' . . . As at present constituted the powers of the Board are so limited that in reality, compared with the Admiralty, the Members more or less correspond to Members of an Advisory Committee rather than responsible Members of a Board." (Minute to the Minister for the Navy, Sir Joseph Cook, 29th January 1920.)⁸

⁶ This was the Coastwatching Organisation, of which more later.

⁷ Admiral Sir Percy Grant, KCVO, CB. At Jutland was Flag Capt and C of S to Vice-Adm Sir Cecil Burney, 2nd i/c Grand Fleet in HMS *Marlborough*. First Naval Memb Aust Naval Board 1919-21; C-in-C Aust Stn 1921-22. B. 1867. Died 8 Sep 1952.

⁸ One of the great weaknesses was that neither in the *Naval Defence Act* nor the *Regulations* was any power of "command" vested in the Board. The powers given were of administration only. The command of the Naval Forces under the *Constitution Act* was vested in the Governor-General. . . . "The Commissions issued by the Governor-General to officers require them to obey orders issued by 'Me' (the Governor-General) or 'other your superior officer for H.M. Service'. The officers belonging to the Board, not being borne on ships or flying their Flags, have no power,

For a major change or development in naval policy the time was not opportune. The League of Nations had been created at the Peace Conference. The need for money for post-war reconstruction and national development favoured a policy of disarmament. The question of defence was relegated to the Imperial Conference proposed for 1921, the immediate naval program being one of reduction. At the same time, intimation of the concern felt by the Government was not wanting, and when asking Parliament for a vote of £3,959,991 for the naval estimate on 9th September 1920, the Prime Minister (Mr Hughes),⁹ remarking that Australia's policy involved taking cognisance of her geographical situation and the fact that the navy must be considered her first line of defence, asked the House to consider "not whether we are spending too much, but whether we are not spending too little".

With the conclusion of hostilities, the Admiralty determined to release all Australian warships—which had been placed under its control for the duration of the war—as soon as possible. The proclamation declaring that war had ended was not made until 31st August 1921, and an order-in-council was promulgated determining the Admiralty's control as at 1st August 1919. In recognition of the services of the Royal Australian Navy during the war, the Admiralty had given to the Commonwealth Government six destroyers and a flotilla of six submarines.¹ The ships of the Australian Navy, including the new additions, arrived in Australia at intervals during 1919 and 1920, but it was not until April 1920 that all were assembled in home waters under the control of the Commonwealth Government through the Naval Board. The effective forces at the time consisted of one battle cruiser, four light cruisers, twelve destroyers, three sloops and six submarines, with various ancillary units.² One light cruiser, *Adelaide*,³ and a collier, *Biloela*,⁴ were being built at Cockatoo Island Dockyard. The entire fleet, comprising twenty-six vessels and the six submarines, was in commission for the visit of the Prince of Wales in May 1920, but the reduction program was implemented in the following September. In addition to the reduction of the active fleet, stringent fuel economies were imposed which restricted the training program and brought strong protests from the Commodore Commanding,⁵ his views being sup-

by their Commissions, to exercise their individual command over the officers and men of the Naval Forces." By *Statutory Rule No. 249* of 1920, the *Naval Forces Regulations* were amended. The Naval Board was charged with the control and administration of all matters relating to the Naval Forces upon policy directed by the Minister, "and shall have executive command of the Naval Forces. The Governor-General may delegate to the Board the functions, and commission it to execute the office, of C-in-C Naval Forces."

⁹ Rt Hon W. M. Hughes, CH. Prime Minister 1915-23; Attorney-General 1939-40; Min for Navy 1940-41. B. Wales, 25 Sep 1864. Died 28 Oct 1952.

¹ These vessels were built under the Admiralty's Emergency War Program.

Anzac, flotilla leader (1917), 1,310 tons, four 4-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts; scrapped 1933.

Tasmania, *Swordsmen*, *Success*, *Stalwart* and *Tattoo*, destroyers (1919), 1,075 tons, three 4-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; scrapped 1933.

J1, *J2*, *J3*, *J4*, *J5*, and *J7*, submarines (1916), 1,820 tons, one 4-in gun, six 18-in torp tubes, 19 kts surface, 9.5 submerged; scrapped 1924-29.

² For complete list, see Appendix 1.

³ HMAS *Adelaide*, light cruiser (1922), 5,100 tons, eight 6-in guns, 25.5 kts.

⁴ HMAS *Biloela*, fleet auxiliary collier (1920), 5,596 tons, 4-in guns, 11 kts.

⁵ Rear-Adm J. S. Dumaesq, CB, CVO; RN. Comd HMAS *Sydney* 1917-19, Aust Sqn 1919-22. B. Sydney, 26 Oct 1873. Died 22 Jul 1922.

ported by the Naval Board. But protest was unavailing. Questions bearing closely upon Pacific affairs—those of the renewals of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty, of Empire defence, and of a common Imperial foreign policy—were on the agenda for the forthcoming Imperial Conference, and it was upon their resolution that Australia's naval defence program awaited.

II

In its origin in 1902, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance marked a change in British foreign policy, hitherto based on a naval strength giving superiority over any possible hostile combination. At the turn of the century the danger was still seen as a hostile Franco-Russian combination, with the Mediterranean as the strategic centre of the world. With the increase of Russian naval power in the Pacific, the maintenance of a naval policy of isolation became too expensive, and was abandoned in favour of one of alliances and understandings. A result of immediate importance to Australia was the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty.⁶ Concluded on 11th February 1902, the original treaty provided for British recognition of Japan's special interests in Korea, and for Japanese recognition of British interests in China. If either party became involved in war "in defence of their respective interests", the other would remain neutral. If another nation joined the war against either ally, the other would come to the aid of its partner.

The treaty was renewed for ten years on 12th August 1905, in the form of a firm military alliance. The parties undertook to recognise each other's special rights and interests in Eastern Asia and India and to formulate common measures to safeguard them if necessary, and "if by reason of an unprovoked attack or aggressive action wherever arising on the part of any other Power or Powers, either of the High Contracting Parties should be involved in war in defence of these territorial rights or interests, the other will immediately come to the assistance of its ally, and will conduct the war in common and make peace in mutual agreement with it".

When—this time after fullest consultation with the Dominion ministers then in London for the Imperial Conference—the alliance was again renewed in July 1911, it still had four years to run, but the extent of the Royal Navy's commitments in Europe against a rapidly rising Germany were clear. The new treaty, to meet objections held against it in the United States, contained an added article which provided that should either party conclude a treaty of general arbitration with a third power, nothing in the Anglo-Japanese agreement should entail upon such a contracting party an obligation to go to war with the power with whom such treaty of arbitration was in force.⁷

⁶ "In 1902, before the German menace arose, the Admiralty, in a memorandum on sea power, told the Dominions that the requirements of naval strategy necessitated our being strong enough to conduct a vigorous naval offensive all over the world, while at the same time concentrating a sufficient force to ensure victory, in the decisive battles, in whatever part of the seas those battles might take place." (Maj-Gen Sir George Aston, Royal Marines, Intell Offr on Admiralty War Staff 1914, in an article in *Brassey's Annual*, 1921-22.)

⁷ At that time Great Britain was endeavouring to arrange a treaty of arbitration with the United States, but negotiations failed. In Sep 1914, however, a "Peace Commission" treaty was concluded between the two countries, under the terms of which they agreed that all disputes between them

The Anglo-Japanese Treaty was born of exigency. It never found unqualified favour on either side, and it is doubtful if it evoked any real enthusiasm among the masses of British and Japanese people. British naval opinion was divided. In America it aroused strong hostility, which had its reflection in the Canadian attitude. As an instrument of exigency, however, the Treaty fulfilled its functions in the 1914-18 war. Britain generally, and Australia particularly, benefited in the freedom from major naval worries in the Far East. Japan also benefited considerably, and the effects so far as she was concerned were immediately apparent in the post-war stocktaking. The war, which had impoverished Britain, had strengthened Japan economically, industrially and strategically. She emerged from it, partly as a result of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, as a major power in the Pacific, firmly entrenched on the Asian mainland and in the former German islands stretching through the Western Pacific to the equator. Her growing strength constituted a challenge to the United States of America, and resulted in rising hostility and a developing naval race between the two countries.

Australia could not fail to take perturbed notice of this situation, especially in regard to Japan's southward expansion and expressed resentment against the White Australia policy, over which a clash had developed at the Peace Conference. There the Japanese had moved an amendment to the Covenant of the League of Nations claiming equality of treatment for all members of the signatory states. The Australian Prime Minister, Mr Hughes, had a hard struggle in successfully opposing the Japanese amendment, which was pressed in varying forms from a number of quarters. The struggle was continued on the question of the conditions of the mandates over the ex-German islands, an attempt to impose the "open door" for men and for goods being made.⁸ Finally, however, the battle was won, and the mandate was granted to Australia in a form empowering her to make laws over the islands as over the mainland, subject to five reservations: (1) no sale of firearms to the natives; (2) no raising of native armies except for the mere defence of the territory; (3) no sale of alcohol to the natives; (4) no raising of fortifications; (5) no slave trade.

This, then, was the situation at the end of the 1914-18 war and in the immediately subsequent months. The naval centre of gravity had shifted from European waters to the Pacific, where the United States and Japan were developing increasing hostility and reaching out towards each other. Each possessed post-Jutland capital ships shortly to commission, and each had capital ship bases in the Pacific. All of Britain's effective capital ships were pre-Jutland vessels, and that battle had proved that certain

should be referred to a Special Investigation Committee. Great Britain thereupon informed Japan that the Peace Commission was regarded by her as equivalent to an arbitration treaty, and that the conditions prescribed by *Article 4* of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty applied. The Japanese Government accepted the interpretation without demur.

⁸ "One of the most striking features of the conference," Mr Hughes told Parliament during the Peace Treaty Debate on 10 Sep 1919, "was the appalling ignorance of every nation as to the affairs of every other nation, its geographical, racial and historical conditions or traditions. It was difficult to make the Council of Ten realise how utterly the safety of Australia depended upon the possession of these islands . . . and that those who hold it [New Guinea] hold us."

classes of British capital ships were unbalanced.⁹ Britain had no building program, and possessed no capital ship base in the southern hemisphere and none east of Malta. The League of Nations had been established, with its underlying principle of the avoidance of war by international agreement, but the failure of the United States of America to join the League seriously limited its current influence and foreseeable possibilities; and although the promise it contained raised the hopes of large sections of the people both in Australia and overseas, such promise was not considered by the Government as a safe substitute for the naval strength upon which the security of the Empire had been based. It was at this juncture, early in 1921, that the British Government announced that Great Britain was no longer able to maintain the navy at the strength necessary for the complete protection of the Empire, and that the Dominions must do their share. The question of Australia's position vis-à-vis both the United States and Japan, and especially in regard to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, became one of urgency.

Clause Six of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty stipulated that twelve months' notice of denunciation should be given by either party before the treaty could be terminated. In June 1920, Great Britain and Japan had jointly notified the League of Nations that, as the treaty did not conform to the provisions of the Covenant, both parties desired that it should do so. This notification was regarded by British law officers as constituting denunciation, and it was held that the treaty would expire on 13th July 1921. The British Government had therefore asked for three months' extension in order to allow the question of renewal to be discussed at the Imperial Conference.

The Australian attitude towards the question of renewal was made clear during the debates in Parliament previous to the Prime Minister's departure to London to attend the Conference. In a speech in the House of Representatives on 7th April 1921 Mr Hughes, referring to Great Britain's announcement that she could no longer provide naval strength for the complete protection of the Empire, pointed out that Australia had spent, on naval defence, very much more than all the other Dominions put together, but that her navy was "ludicrously inadequate" to defend the country. Since Australia's destiny lay in the Pacific, an alliance with the greatest power in the East "means everything to us". Mr Hughes concluded: "As to the renewal of the Treaty with Japan, this is my attitude, and I submit it for the consideration of honourable members: I am in favour of renewing the treaty in any form that is satisfactory to Britain, America and ourselves. I am prepared to renew it in those circumstances. If it is suggested that the renewal should take a form which would involve the sacrifice of those principles which we ourselves regard as sacred [i.e., the White Australia policy and Anglo-American unity] I am not prepared to accept it." This attitude had the support of the majority in

⁹ "I was determined not to build British ships that were unsuitable, after our lessons of Jutland; ships that would be unbalanced, owing to so much weight being put into guns, that they would have too little protective armour, as had been the case in our battle cruisers; ships that a lucky shot could blow up, with their crews." (Lord Chatfield, *It Might Happen Again*, 1947, p. 5.)

Parliament, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Tudor, summarising his views in the words: "That the White Australia policy should be maintained, and that nothing should be done to create diversion between us and the United States of America. If we can achieve these two things, in addition to an extension of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty, we shall be doing something which, I believe, is the desire of the majority of the people."

Mr Hughes thus left Australia with a mandate to press for the renewal of the treaty, and, supported by the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Mr W. F. Massey, he did so.¹ But opposition came from Canada, whose Prime Minister, Mr Arthur Meighen, opposed renewal in any form on three grounds: that the reason for its existence was past; that such entanglements were incompatible with the idea of the League of Nations; and that both the United States and China would regard the renewal with disfavour. Failing to secure denunciation, he would propose insertion of a clause exempting Canada until the Dominion Parliament approved. This led to forceful and forthright utterances in support of renewal by Hughes, and to a cleavage in Empire councils which, although not referred to in the official "Summary of Proceedings and Documents" of the conference, reached the Press in partial accounts and became public on 30th June 1921.

Actually, the belief that the 1920 notification to the League of Nations constituted denunciation was not upheld by the Lord Chancellor, and it was agreed that the treaty was still in force and would continue to operate until twelve months after the date on which either party gave notice of denunciation. No decision about its renewal was reached at the conference, and thus one matter of major importance on the agenda remained in abeyance when the conference ended. As to Empire defence, it was agreed that sea power was necessarily the basis of the Empire's existence, and decided, after most careful consideration of the whole field of foreign and imperial politics, that the Empire *qua* Empire must have a navy at least equal to that of any other power, and the necessity of cooperation among the various portions of the Empire to provide the naval forces required was recognised. But here again, as to the manner of such cooperation, no conclusion was reached. The receipt of the invitation to the Washington Conference on the limitation of naval armaments—issued to the powers by the President of the United States (Mr Harding) on 11th July 1921—caused this question to be shelved, pending the outcome of the Washington discussions.² In his Washington invitation, Mr Harding proposed a pre-

¹ It is desirable to make this fact plain, as there has been considerable misrepresentation of Australia's attitude, by British, American and Japanese writers. Even so eminent an authority as Lord Chatfield laid that attitude open to doubt when he wrote in *It Might Happen Again*, p. 88: "We had abandoned in 1921 our Alliance with Japan with the full assent of, indeed under some pressure from, the Dominions. In this act, however politically wise, we had weakened, most gravely, our imperial strategic position. We had turned a proved friend in military, if not political, matters into a potential and powerful foe ten thousand miles away from our main bases. A potentially hostile fleet had thus, as it were, suddenly sprung into existence."

² The resolution on naval defence passed by the Prime Ministers at the Conference on 27 Jul 1921, was: "That, while recognising the necessity of cooperation among the various portions of the Empire to provide such naval defence as may prove to be essential for security, and, while holding that equality with the naval strength of any other Power is a minimum standard for that purpose, this Conference is of opinion that the method and extent of such cooperation are matters for the final determination of the several Parliaments concerned, and that any recommendations thereon should be deferred until after the coming Conference on Disarmament." "That Resolution," the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty (Mr L. S. Amery) told the

liminary meeting on Pacific and Far Eastern questions between the powers most directly interested, and herein lay the settlement of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance problem; for the final article of the Four Power Treaty concluded between the British Empire, the United States of America, France and Japan as a result of this meeting, provided that its ratification would bring the Alliance to an end.

The Washington Conference opened on 12th November 1921, Australia's representative being the Minister for Home and Territories, Senator Pearce.³ The Powers represented were the United States of America, the British nations, Japan, France and Italy; while Belgium, China, Holland and Portugal, although they did not take part in discussions of limitation of naval armaments, were represented when other matters concerning the Pacific and Far East were considered.

In broad outline, the results of the conference established capital ship and aircraft carrier ratios for the three main powers on a 5:5:3 basis; in terms of displacement tonnage at 525,000 and 135,000 each for the British Empire and the United States of America, and at 315,000 and 81,000 tons for Japan. No capital ship was to exceed 35,000 tons displacement, or to carry guns in excess of 16-inch. The maximum tonnage of aircraft carriers was fixed at 33,000 tons as to two each from the aggregate tonnage allowed, and at 27,000 tons each for the remainder of that tonnage, all carriers being forbidden guns of greater than 8-inch calibre. No quotas were established in respect of other types of ships. The United States presented a definite proposal to limit the total tonnage of cruisers, flotilla leaders and destroyers, but this was not acceptable to Great Britain, whose position, having regard to the extent of her sea-borne trade, was bound up in the principle "that the number of battleships required is mainly governed by the strength of the enemy's battle fleet, but that the number of cruisers and small craft depends upon the interests which they have to defend".⁴ The only limitation, therefore, placed upon vessels other than capital ships and aircraft carriers was that none was to exceed 10,000 tons displacement, or to carry guns larger than 8-inch. Twenty years was accepted as the effective life of capital ships and aircraft carriers, and with certain minor exceptions all capital ship building programs were abandoned, and a ten-year lapse before commencing replacement building was agreed on. One exception was that the British Empire was permitted to complete two new capital ships (*Nelson* and *Rodney*)⁵ in 1925, to give her 16-inch gun ships such as the other two powers possessed. Replacement was to be accompanied by scrapping to keep aggregate tonnages within treaty limits. France and Italy were each allotted

House of Commons when speaking on the 1921-22 Naval Estimates, "will, I venture to think, be regarded in future years as an important landmark, alike in the history of British naval policy, and of the development of Imperial cooperation."

³ Rt Hon Sir George Pearce, KCVO. Minister for Defence 1908-9, 1910-13, 1914-21, 1932-34; Member of C'wealth Grants Commn 1939-44; Chairman Board of Business Admin 1940-48. B. Mt Barker, SA, 14 Jan 1870. Died 24 Jun 1952.

⁴ Rear-Adm K. G. B. Dewar, in a paper "Overseas Commerce and War".

⁵ Battleships (1927), 33,900 tons, nine 16-in and twelve 6-in guns, two 24.5-in torp tubes, 23 kts; scrapped 1948.

capital ships totalling 175,000 tons, and aircraft carriers totalling 60,000, and were permitted to lay down new capital ships in 1927 and 1928.

A proposal by Great Britain, supported by the Dominions, to abolish submarines was not accepted. Instead, a supplementary treaty attempted to control submarine activity by establishing rules limiting the conditions under which merchant ships could be attacked or destroyed, and binding belligerent submarines to these rules. By *Article XIX* of the treaty the British Empire, the United States, and Japan, agreed to maintain the *status quo* with regard to fortifications and naval bases in specified territories and possessions in the Pacific, the mainlands of the contracting parties being in each case exempt, as were Singapore and the Hawaiian Islands. The treaty was to remain in force until 31st December 1936, and if none of the contracting parties gave notice to the United States Government one year before that date of its intention to bring the treaty to an end, it would continue in force until two years after the date on which one of the parties announced its wish to end it.

III

An immediate result of the Washington treaties—which were ratified by all the powers concerned—was to induce a feeling of security among the British and Australian people. The Four Power Pact was generally seen by them as replacing the Anglo-Japanese Alliance by establishing equilibrium in the Pacific, and providing the basis for a lasting settlement.⁶ Under the terms of the Disarmament Treaty—the principle of which was felt to be an extension of that underlying the League of Nations, namely the avoidance of war by international agreement—the British Empire, although reduced to a one-power standard, would enjoy a ten-year naval holiday which would secure that standard and obviate the threatened naval race. In naval circles, however, satisfaction was far from complete. The Japanese smarted under the 60 per cent ratio, and resentment at their smaller ratios was created in the French and Italian navies.⁷ On the British side the Admiralty were strongly averse to the ten-year holiday for capital ship building, their objections being that the means of naval construction, the Admiralty dockyards and private firms—and their plant and skilled technicians—on whom in emergency guns, armour and naval instruments depended, would suffer, and that when construction did become necessary, much of Britain's ability to build naval ships would have been

⁶ "This Treaty establishes an equilibrium in the Pacific. As far as any action of man can do so, it ensures peace for the next ten years for Australia." (Mr Hughes in the House of Representatives, 26 Jul 1922. *Commonwealth Debates*, Vol 99, pp. 786 et seq.)

⁷ "The dignified political representative of Japan, Baron Kato, had as his chief naval adviser Admiral Kanji-Kato, an extremist. I was asked by Mr Balfour to try and induce Admiral Kato to agree to the ratio. I had a long and painful interview, but entirely failed to move the little admiral. He told me he would, personally, never agree to a 60 per cent ratio. Weeks passed over this discussion, and it was not until January that the Japanese Government eventually gave up the fight." (Chatfield, p. 4.) (Admiral Kanji-Kato is probably identical with the Captain Kanji-Kato who commanded the cruiser *Ibuki* which was part escort of the first A.I.F. convoy in 1914, and who was anxious to take his ship into action against *Emden* at Cocos Island.) "How were the Japanese envoys received on their return from the capital of the United States of America? In silence; and it was with very great difficulty, and only as the result of the exercise of official care, that they were prevented from being made the recipients of recrimination, and, in fact, marked hostility." (Senator Bakhap in the Senate, 27 Jul 1922. *Commonwealth Debates*, Vol 99, p. 831.)

lost. There developed in Britain from the ten-year holiday what was called among senior naval and military officers "the Ten-Year Rule", under which it was assumed that there would be no major war for ten years, and which the British Government, in its anxiety to economise on armament expenditure, renewed each year.⁸

Defence retrenchment in Australia followed developments overseas, and the Naval Board was desired to furnish a statement of naval policy for the financial year 1922-23 based on a reduction of £500,000 in annual expenditure. The Governor-General's speech on the opening of Parliament (28th June 1922) foreshadowed the cuts to come in the words: "In view of the results attained at the Washington Conference which, my advisers believe, guarantee peace in the Pacific for some time to come, it is proposed to reduce the establishment of the Navy and Army, and postpone the expansion of the Air Force."

Ships in commission at the time consisted of three light cruisers, four destroyers, two sloops and the submarines, with the necessary auxiliaries. The Naval Board offered four alternative reduction schemes for the consideration of the Ministry, at the same time expressing extreme concern at the sacrifices involved, and pointing out that earlier economies had anticipated the results of the Washington Conference and that the further cuts the Board were now called upon to meet found them unprepared to offer any considered naval policy for the future. The Ministry was determined, however, to press ahead with the economies, and decided upon the Board's second alternative, to pay off the submarine force.⁹ This, together with the placing of additional vessels in reserve, reduced ships in commission to three light cruisers, three destroyers, and one sloop, with ancillaries.¹ Other economies included the closing of Osborne House, Geelong, hitherto used as a submarine depot, and the restriction in Citizen Force training, entailing the closing of naval training centres at Thursday Island, Townsville, and Albany, while survey and dredging work towards

⁸ "The Cabinet decided that the Ten-Year Rule should commence afresh each year, so that until it was revoked the three services *would always be at 'ten years' notice*'. Protest was unavailing. Gagged and bound hand and foot, they were handed over to the Treasury Gestapo. Never has there been such a successful attempt to hamstring the security of an Empire. It was of course in those days a secret instruction, not to be let out, so that a future enemy might not hear of it and lay his plans. Parliament must not be told, nor the public." Chatfield, p. 11. But Mr Churchill said the "Ten-Year Rule" originated with the War Cabinet in 1919; that in 1927 the War Office obtained the approval of the Cabinet and Committee of Imperial Defence that the 1919 decision should be extended for the Army only to cover ten years "from the present date", and that in 1928 Mr Churchill's own proposal was accepted "that the basis of Estimates for the Service Departments should rest upon the statement that there would be no major war for a period of ten years, and that this basis should advance from day to day, but that the assumption should be reviewed every year by the Committee of Imperial Defence". Mr Churchill said: "It has been contended that the acceptance of this principle lulled the Fighting Departments into a false sense of security, that Research was neglected and only short-term views prevailed, especially where expense was involved. Up till the time when I left office in 1929 I felt so hopeful that the peace of the world would be maintained that I saw no reason to take any new decision; nor in the event was I proved wrong. War did not break out till the autumn of 1939. Ten years is a long time in this fugitive world." Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol I (1948), p. 40.

⁹ Four of the vessels were disposed of during the months of February, March, April and May 1924, for a total sum of £15,470. The fittings of a fifth were disposed of in April for a sum of £1,201. The sixth, *J7*, after remaining non-effective at Westernport for some considerable time, was disposed of in Dec 1929.

¹ *Melbourne*, *Adelaide*, *Sydney*; *Anzac*, *Stalwart*, *Swordsman*; *Platypus* (Depot and Fleet Repair Ship); *Geranium* (Survey); *Cerberus* and *Countess of Hopetoun* (Tenders to Gunnery School); *Franklin* (attached to Naval College). *Adelaide* commissioned 5 Aug 1922.

the development of Henderson Naval Base at Cockburn Sound, Western Australia, was terminated. The reductions effected economies both in the sea-going staff and that of shore establishments, including civilian staff, and final naval estimates for 1922-23 amounted to £2,457,250 as compared with an appropriation for 1921-22 of £3,091,138. Under the terms of the Washington Treaty, the battle cruiser *Australia* was to be scrapped; and she was, and finally sunk outside Sydney Heads on 12th April 1924.

The fleet, although small, had reached a high standard of efficiency under Rear-Admiral Dumaresq, and the standard was to be maintained under subsequent commanders.² The Australian Navy was approaching the point at which, in the matter of trained officers and men, it would be largely self-contained, and the numbers required on loan from the Royal Navy were being reduced annually. An indication of the calibre of the officers who had received their initial training at the Australian Naval College had been given in November 1920, when the Naval Board was advised from England that the whole class of seventeen officers trained at Jervis Bay who left Australia in 1917 to join the Grand Fleet had—with the exception of two who were sick—passed the gunnery examination at Whale Island, and out of a class of seventy-five R.N. and R.A.N. officers, the first three places were taken by R.A.N. College graduates, and the whole R.A.N. class was specially commended by the commanding officer of the Gunnery School.³

By 1923—again an Imperial Conference year—the first flush of optimism raised by the League of Nations and the Washington Conference was fading, and evidence of a change in the public attitude towards defence was becoming apparent. The rising industrial and military strength of Japan was viewed with concern, and the question of defence again assumed importance, the divergent views of the non-Labour and Labour parties on this subject now finding explicit expression. The Hughes Ministry had gone out of office in 1923, being succeeded on 9th February by the Bruce-Page⁴ Government, with Mr Bruce as Prime Minister. This Ministry, as did succeeding non-Labour Ministries throughout the period between the wars, continued the policy of active cooperation with Great Britain and the other Dominions in a scheme of Imperial Defence based upon sea power. The Labour party, on the other hand, *while in opposition*, contended that Australia should and could provide adequate local defence but avoid overseas commitments and the dispatch of forces overseas in any future war. Naval defence was visualised by Labour party spokesmen as local defence of the coastlines and approaches carried out by submarines, local defence craft, and aircraft. Debates and voting in Federal Parliament on naval as on most other subjects were conducted on strictly

² For details of appointments of Rear-Admirals Commanding the RAN, see Appendix 2.

³ In 1927, graduates of the Naval College headed the classes in gunnery, signalling, torpedo, and anti-submarine work.

⁴ Rt Hon Viscount Bruce, CH, MC. (1914-17: Capt, Worcestershire Regt and Royal Fusiliers.) Prime Minister 1923-29; High Commissioner for Australia in London 1933-45; President, League of Nations Council 1936. B. Melbourne, 15 Apr 1883.

Rt Hon Sir Earle Page, GCMG, CH. (1st AIF: Capt AAMC.) Min for Commerce 1934-39, 1940-41, for Health 1937-39, 1949-56; Prime Minister Apr 1939. B. Grafton, NSW, 8 Aug 1880.

party lines, and voices were rarely raised on the Navy's behalf by Labour supporters.⁵ The speeches of the two party leaders in the 1923 Imperial Conference debate epitomised the opposing stands, and set the general tone for the defence debates throughout the period. They are of interest also since for the first time the contentious question of Singapore came to the forefront in the Australian Parliament, and the attitudes of the two parties towards it were stated.

Mention of a capital ship base at Singapore as of vital importance to Empire security in the Far East was made in the Jellicoe report, which stated that the provision of a large dock there was a prime need, and that in their then badly defended state Hong Kong and Singapore could easily be captured by a sudden Japanese attack. If successful at Singapore, Japan could gain a foothold on the west coast of Australia and be in a position to dominate trade routes in the Pacific and paralyse the operations of the British Navy. To counteract these tactics, Singapore's defences should be made impregnable. The report envisaged the main points of British strategy in the Far East to be: (1) to provide an adequate fleet in the Far East, (2) to defend Singapore and Hong Kong (in that order) against attack by capital ships supported by a strong landing force, (3) to push on with the Cockburn Sound base in Western Australia, and to defend it adequately against the same scale of attack. But by *Article XIX* of the Washington Treaty—maintaining the *status quo* with regard to fortifications and naval bases—Hong Kong's defences could not now be strengthened, and work on the Cockburn Sound base was, as earlier stated, suspended by the Australian Government in 1922.⁶

The claims of Singapore as a naval base were put to the Dominion Prime Ministers at the 1921 Imperial Conference by Lord Beatty⁷—then First Sea Lord—who addressed them *in camera* and “stated the reasons why the base must be there, and nowhere else. He told us, too—a fact which I think will be fairly obvious to honourable members if they will look at a map—that, if it is not there, Australia will be helpless if attacked.”⁸ There was no mention of this in the official report of the conference, possibly because—as suggested by Colonel Repington⁹—it

⁵ But there were exceptions. When speaking in the Senate on 5 Jul 1923, a Labour Senator, Senator Ogden, charging the Bruce-Page Government with failure to provide adequate naval defence, said: “I do not want to see the Government launching out upon any wild and useless naval expenditure, but I realise that we have an enormous responsibility to the people of Australia, and we shall have to face it. . . . It should be our object to bring the outlying portions of the Empire closer together. Under present conditions we do not want isolation or separation. We want to do something that will preserve the unity of the British nation.” And he concluded his remarks with the comment: “It is possible that in this matter I am voicing opinions not usually heard from this side of the Chamber.”

⁶ Senator Pearce, speaking in the Senate in 1934, referred to the suspension of work in 1922 and added: “It was the Admiralty which after the decision to construct the Singapore base had been reached, recommended that the Henderson naval base should not be restarted on the lines originally put forward by Admiral Henderson.” *Commonwealth Debates*, 1 Aug 1934, Vol 144, pp. 100: et seq.

⁷ Admiral of Fleet Rt Hon Earl Beatty, GCB, OM, GCVO, DSO; RN. Comd Grand Fleet 1916-19; First Sea Lord 1919-27. B. 17 Jan 1871. Died 11 Mar 1936.

⁸ Mr Hughes' speech to House of Representatives, 30 Jul 1923. *Commonwealth Debates*, Vol 104, p. 1781.

⁹ Repington, “Singapore or Sydney”, in *Policy and Arms* (1924). (Lt-Col C. a'C. Repington, CMG. Of Tamworth, Warwick, Eng; b. 29 Jan 1858. Died 25 May 1925.)

was thought advisable to withhold any announcement pending the result of the Washington Conference. Eventually the plan was made public, and accepted by the United Kingdom Parliament in May 1923.

It had by no means unanimous support. A number of naval authorities—among other critics—questioned Singapore's value as a naval base, especially in regard to Australia's requirements. Among them, Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson's views are worthy of note because of the detailed study he had made of Australia's defence needs. He said, on 22nd July 1923: "The Government having finally decided to establish a naval base at Singapore which, undoubtedly, is a strong strategic position, it would ill become me as an old and retired officer out of touch with the modern navy, to attempt to criticise its action. At the same time, I think that the main base for a Fleet for the defence of Australia and the Pacific must be in Australia itself." This point was also made by Colonel Repington who, besides questioning Singapore's strategical value to Australian defence, referred to its lack of backing in continental, population, and industrial resources. Writing in the London *Daily Telegraph* in July 1923, Repington said:

It is of little importance where ships are distributed in peace. The only test is war. It is the tradition of Japan to seize the initiative, and begin when the flag falls or a little before. We must expect the loss of Singapore and Hong Kong before our Grand Fleet trails out there. We must also expect the appearance of Japanese submarines in the Sea of Malacca. It is useless to send a battalion to Singapore when Japan has shown herself capable of capturing a first class fortress like Port Arthur, defended by 45,000 men.

He thus emphasised Singapore's outstanding weakness—complete dependence upon a fleet capable of securing for the British in time of war the sea communications of the invading and defending forces respectively, without which "the fall of Singapore, sooner or later, was inevitable; as the fall of every isolated fortress on land or at sea has been inevitable throughout the whole history of war".¹

During the between-the-wars period, the British Government and Admiralty assured and reassured Australia of their ability and intention to send an adequate fleet to Singapore when needed, and the Australian Government accepted the provision of a base there as a condition precedent to a large fleet being stationed in the Pacific. As to the strategical significance of Singapore, the Australian Government accepted Admiralty views, which were very strongly pressed by the highest professional authorities. Nor is it likely that the Admiralty would have changed its intentions regarding Singapore had the Australian Government disagreed with those views. A Far Eastern fleet on a joint basis as outlined in the Jellicoe report, went by the board with the acceptance of the capital ship and aircraft-carrier ratios of the Washington Treaty, by which Australia lost her only capital ship; and it is probable that, in the Admiralty's considering the qualifications of the site of a base for a British fleet far from its home

¹ Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power* (1946).

waters, the fact of such site being—as in the case of Singapore—solely under the control of the British Government, carried considerable weight.²

Speaking on 24th July 1923, Mr Bruce contended that Australia's defence could not be carried out by a land force alone, and that it was beyond her strength to provide adequate naval defence without the assistance of an ally. "I suggest that to every serious Australian there is only one natural ally for us, and that is the rest of the British Empire." Mr Bruce continued:

At one time there was a suggestion that we should have a Dominion unit operating in the Pacific, to which all the Dominions should contribute. I think that Australia would welcome that today, and would be quite prepared to do her share in providing such a unit, for the simple reason that Australia has always provided her share of naval defence. . . . During the whole period covered by the attempt to bring about an Empire Defence scheme, Australia has played a part of which she may well be proud. During that period Australia has done more in regard to naval defence than all the other Dominions put together.³

Speaking of Singapore, he said:

The provision of this base is a condition precedent to a large fleet being stationed in Australian waters or the Pacific, and as such it must commend itself to the people of Australia, for it embodies the ideas of Australian Governments of all political opinions. The proposal shows that Great Britain recognises that the heart of the Empire is not now in the North Sea but has been moved to the Pacific and that the interests of the Empire in the Pacific are of such paramount importance that the time has come when steps should be taken to safeguard them.

Three days later, in the same debate, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Charlton, deprecating the Government's "Imperialism" and incentive to war, discounted the suggestion of any danger from Japan and emphasised his faith in the League of Nations, which "public men are not endeavouring to popularise. . . . They apparently have abandoned it in despair." Deploping the position in which failure to ensure peace by agreement made some form of defence necessary, Mr Charlton continued:

We must defend Australia from aggression and I believe that we can best do so with aerial and submarine forces. . . . We are often told that Australia will be unable to defend her 12,000 miles of coastline in the event of war. My opinion is that

² Colonel Repington said, in "Singapore or Sydney": "The Dominion representatives are usually disposed to fall in with any naval arrangements suggested by the Admiralty, which is a very authoritative body for them. Singapore as a naval panacea has also this particular attraction for Anzac statesmen—namely that it does not burden their budget but is a charge on our taxpayers at home. If our sailors tell them that the Grand Fleet at Singapore covers Australia and New Zealand by virtue of some flanking quality, then the responsibility of the Admiralty is engaged: but if the Dominion representatives take this opinion without using their brains, and there is hereafter found a fallacy in the claim, then the responsibility towards the Dominions rests with their own representatives."

But the Australian Navy was not born of a disposition to fall in with any naval arrangements suggested by the Admiralty. And neither New Zealand nor Australia sought to evade financial responsibility in regard to Singapore. The claim that the Grand Fleet at Singapore would cover Australia and New Zealand was never found fallacious because, in the event, that fleet never materialised.

³ Quoting defence expenditure figures of Great Britain and the Dominions, Mr Bruce gave the following comparisons in expenditure per head of population:

	1913-14	1922-23
Gt Britain	Army, Air: 12s5d, Navy: 21s4d	Army, Air: 30s2d, Navy: 26s8d
Canada	Army, Air: 5s2d, Navy: Nil	Army, Air: 5s11d, Navy: 1s4d
Australia	Army, Air: 11s4d, Navy: 8s1d	Army, Air: 9s1d, Navy: 8s2d
S. Africa	—	Defence: 11s8d
New Zealand	Defence: 9s11d	Army, Air: 6s3d, Navy: 4s7d

Australia can defend herself against any foe who may come here. I am firmly convinced of that. . . . If we had an adequate air force we could send it out 500 miles beyond our shores to meet an oncoming foe. Men could always be obtained for military operations. In case of an attack every able-bodied man in the country would take his place in the ranks. . . . Personally I do not believe we are in any danger of attack.

On the subject of Singapore Mr Charlton expressed himself as

emphatically unfavourable to Australia taking any part in the establishment of this naval base. I see no justification for departing from the policy we have observed in the past in regard to defence matters. We have never previously agreed to assist Great Britain in defence preparations outside Australia. . . . The Labour Party's policy is to promote world peace, and, consistently with Australia's goodwill to her kindred overseas, declares its readiness to take full responsibility for Australia's defence, but is opposed to the raising of Forces for service outside the Commonwealth, or promise of participation in any future overseas war, except by a decision of the people.

In the between-war period such a force as the Labour party's leaders advocated—a combination of air force and coastal or submarine craft—was envisaged and its attractions widely and enthusiastically canvassed. As is invariably the case with the development of a new weapon, the achievements and potentialities of attack by it at first overshadowed those of defence against it. The war had brought both the submarine and the aircraft into prominence, and the view was widely held that they had completely changed the character of sea power, and especially had reduced the value of capital ships and other large surface war vessels as instruments of that power. That the day of such vessels was past and their usefulness completely nullified was argued increasingly by representatives of a school of thought which included some who—such as Lord Fisher, Sir Percy Scott and other senior naval officers—spoke with voices that expressed authority and carried weight with the public and the Press.⁴ Their views received wide publicity, the more so since they coincided with the wishes of so many for a cheap and easy solution of the problem of naval defence, explained through a simple sum in arithmetic which everyone could understand. "The future of Australia must look black," said Mr Green in the House of Representatives on 17th July 1923, "if we are to spend the greater part of our revenue in the purchase of battleships, when

⁴ Lord Fisher, in a letter to the *London Times* of 20 Oct 1919 wrote: "It is as clear as daylight that the future of war at sea absolutely precludes the use of any war vessel except submarines. Therefore, why keep any of the present lot?"

Writing on the attacks on Defence Expenditure in Britain during this period Chatfield said: "All forms of ridicule and misrepresentation in articles or cartoons were welcomed. 'Scrap the lot,' said even Jack Fisher in his old age." Chatfield, p. 191.

Sir Percy Scott, addressing the Australian Natives Association in London in 1924, denounced the building of battleships and condemned the Singapore Base as useless to Australia, which, he said, should easily be able to protect herself by submarines and aeroplanes.

More than once quoted extensively in the House of Representatives by a Labour supporter (Mr A. E. Green, Kalgoorlie) was an article in *McClure's Magazine* of June 1923, in which Rear-Adm W. F. Fullam, U.S.N., wrote on "The Passing of Sea Power" an excerpt being: "The wings of Sea Power have been clipped. New naval weapons have vastly strengthened the defences and greatly weakened the offence in overseas warfare. Great armadas and armies cannot again cross the seas. With the sea as a buffer, weak nations can defy the strong. A puny power without a navy can challenge the strongest battle fleet. It can, with intelligent energy, make its coast impregnable against a hundred dreadnoughts. With an impenetrable barrage of mines, air forces, torpedoes and submarines, it can easily hold a maritime enemy one hundred miles from its shores." In support of his views, Rear-Adm Fullam quoted from statements by Lord Fisher, Sir Percy Scott, Rear-Adm S. S. Hall, Vice-Adm Mark Kerr, Admiral Lord Wemyss, Admiral W. S. Sims, USN, Rear-Adm Bradley A. Fiske, USN, and Admiral Scheer—a formidable list.

a modern battleship costs no less than £7,000,000. A modern battle-plane is estimated to cost £2,500, so that for the cost of one battleship Australia might have 2,800 modern battle-planes. Judging by what I have read, and from the opinions of the authorities I have quoted, it is clear that for the expenditure of a comparatively small amount of money Australia might be made immune from attack by even the most powerful naval force in the world."

From every aspect the form of defence thus offered was attractive to the Labour party. Its functions could but be defensive and, moreover, local, confined to the defence of the coast against raids or invasion, and of shipping in adjacent waters. Dangerous entanglements in quarrels that Labour leaders considered were no concern of Australia's would thus be avoided. Its efficiency—although unproved by experience—was vouched for by eminent authorities. And it provided a further attraction on the score of its comparative cheapness and the fact that money spent on it could be spent in Australia to a far greater extent than that expended on naval construction. A policy of local naval and air defence against sea-borne raids and invasion was, then, adopted by the Labour party, with air power as the first line of defence.

Australia was represented at the 1923 Imperial Conference by the Prime Minister, Mr Bruce, and Senator Wilson, Honorary Minister. Vice-Admiral Sir Allan Everett,⁵ the retiring First Naval Member, and Rear-Admiral Hall-Thompson,⁶ First Naval Member designate, were present as naval advisers. Resolutions passed affirmed the necessity for the adequate defence of Empire territories and trade; that it rested with the parliaments of the several parts of the Empire to decide the nature and extent of any action taken by them to that end; that local defence was the primary responsibility of each portion of the Empire represented at the conference; that requisite fuel and repair bases must be provided at strategic points in the various Dominions; and that Empire naval strength should be maintained at one-power parity. Notice was taken of the interest of Australia, New Zealand and India in the Singapore Base; and the necessity for the safeguarding of the Mediterranean route and the defence of Britain against air attack. The final resolution expressed the desire of the conference to attain these objectives concurrently with a further limitation of armaments, "and trusts that no opportunity may be lost to promote this object".

It was pointed out at the conference that the principle of one-power parity imposed an unduly heavy burden on Great Britain if unaided, and that the necessary naval strength could only be maintained by the cooperation of all the peoples of the Empire. This had its reflection in the Naval Estimates for 1924-25, in which it was stated that "the security afforded

⁵ Admiral Sir Allan Everett, KCMG, KCVO, CB; RN. Comd 4 Lt Crsr Sqn 1918-19, 8 Lt Crsr Sqn 1919-21; First Naval Member 1921-23; C-in-C China Sqn 1924-25. B. 22 Feb 1868. Died 22 Jan 1938.

⁶ Admiral P. H. Hall-Thompson, CB, CMG; RN. Captain 1913; R-Adm 1923; Naval Adviser to NZ Govt 1919-21; First Naval Member 1923-26; Comd 3 Battle Sqn 1927-28. B. 1874. Died 6 Jul 1950.

by the British Fleet can be accepted without obligation or reflection on our part only if an Australian Squadron, of strength commensurate with our nationhood, can in emergency work side by side with the other squadrons of the Empire".

In January 1924 Mr Ramsay MacDonald, leader of the Labour party, replaced Mr Baldwin as Prime Minister of Great Britain. Within a month of taking office the new Government informed the Dominions that it had decided for the time being to incur no further expenditure on Singapore Naval Base. A few days later the Dominions Prime Ministers received from Great Britain by telegraph a draft statement of the British Government's policy regarding Singapore, which had been prepared for announcement in Parliament, and on which they were invited to express their views before it was made public. The statement announced that the decision not to proceed with the Singapore Base was on the grounds that to do so would be inconsistent with its policy of international cooperation through a strengthened and enlarged League of Nations, the settlement of disputes by conciliation and judicial arbitration, and the creation of conditions which would make a comprehensive agreement on limitation of armaments possible. The question of economy did not enter the matter, which was one of principle. Of the Dominions only one Government, that of South Africa, expressed agreement with the views of the British Government. The Canadian Government, adopting a position it was to take up again later regarding Pacific defence, considered that it was "not in a position to offer any advice". But the Governments of New Zealand, Australia and Newfoundland strongly opposed the British Government's views and decision.

The Governor-General of New Zealand, Lord Jellicoe, pointed out that without Singapore a British Fleet in the Pacific would have no suitable base from which to work nearer than Malta, which was 6,000 miles away, and therefore "for the purposes of capital ships in either the Pacific or Indian Oceans it is of no value". He reminded the British Government that "last session the New Zealand Parliament, as an earnest of its anxiety that the fortification of Singapore should be proceeded with, voted one hundred thousand pounds, and it will not stop at that".

Mr Bruce, while expressing the sympathy of the Australian Government with the ideals inspiring the proposed policy, conveyed the Government's view that the methods suggested would have the opposite effect to that sought.

We think . . . that if the proposal . . . is abandoned by your Government, incalculable harm will be done to the Empire's prestige, the confidence of smaller nations will be shattered, the ambitions of lesser powers will be increased, and deep distrust will be caused throughout the whole Empire. Not by actions having such results as these can we hope to bring about further reductions in armaments. . . . Therefore, on behalf of our Commonwealth, which has on every possible occasion proved its loyalty to the Empire, we urge you even at this late hour to reconsider your decision.⁷

⁷ *Singapore Naval Base. Correspondence with Self-Governing Dominions and India.* Comd 2083.

Mr Bruce added that Australia recognised her financial obligation in regard to the base and it was the Government's intention to submit to Parliament proposals for a substantial Australian contribution.

The British Government, however, decided to adhere to its policy, which Mr MacDonald announced in the House of Commons on 18th March 1924, at the same time making clear the views of the Dominions and the offers of financial contributions from New Zealand and Australia.

IV

The decision regarding Singapore placed a different complexion on Australian defence, and was a factor in causing the Government to institute a long-term naval expansion program in Australia's own interests, including the building of two cruisers to Washington Treaty limits to replace H.M.A. Ships *Sydney* and *Melbourne*,⁸ which had reached the age limit in 1923. The five-year development program, which Mr Bruce announced to Parliament when introducing the Defence Equipment Bill in the House of Representatives on 27th June 1924, dealt with the three arms of defence, and with munitions. The largest share went to the navy, and included the construction of two 10,000-ton cruisers and two ocean-going submarines; the provision of five 8,000-ton oil tanks and 32,000 tons of fuel; and a survey of the Barrier Reef. Explaining the decision to build cruisers, Mr Bruce said that exhaustive enquiries overseas had convinced him that the capital ship remained the determining factor in sea power. Britain's capital ships would deter any country sending a great expeditionary force against Australia, but cruisers were necessary to counter possible raids by minor forces. "The last consideration which it appears to me proves our problem to be a naval one is the necessity of keeping our trade routes open so that our commerce may be carried freely to other countries of the world, and thus enable us to continue our economic life." In Parliament the Opposition endeavoured to obtain deferment of expenditure on naval construction pending a further disarmament conference, and, failing that, the construction of the cruisers in Australia, a question which excited a nation-wide controversy. Various factors weighed against construction in Australia, chief among them being the cost, the fact that most of the material would have to be imported, and that the existing yards could not build two such vessels simultaneously. It was endeavoured to find a compromise by building one of the vessels in Australia, and estimates of cost were drawn up by the Naval Board and the Commonwealth Shipping Board, and were considered by a committee under the chairmanship of Sir John Monash. The committee found that building both vessels in Great Britain would effect a saving which could be used to beneficial effect in other directions in Australia.⁹ After con-

⁸ HMAS *Sydney*, light cruiser (1912), 5,400 tons, eight 6-in guns, 25.5 kts; scrapped 1929.

HMAS *Melbourne*, light cruiser (1912), 5,400 tons, eight 6-in guns, 25.5 kts; scrapped in England 1929.

⁹ It was stated in the Monash committee report that "upon any set of assumptions, the cost of building a 10,000-ton cruiser at Cockatoo Dock would be roundly £1,000,000 sterling more than the sum for which such a cruiser could be purchased from a British dockyard and delivered in

sidering this report, the Government decided that it would seek tenders in Great Britain for (a) one cruiser built in Great Britain, (b) two cruisers built in Great Britain, (c) one cruiser built in Great Britain and one in Australia; and in Australia for one cruiser built in Australia, and would then follow whatever course it considered best in the light of the tenders. Ultimately the tender of Messrs John Brown of Clydebank was accepted for the construction of both cruisers at a cost of £1,091,772 each,¹ and a contract was entered into with Messrs Vickers Ltd for the construction in Great Britain of the two submarines. The accepted cruiser price was lower by £818,000 than the lowest tender for the construction of one vessel in Australia.

The desire of the Opposition, and to a lesser degree the Government, to keep Cockatoo Island Dockyard employed and retain its technical staff, was in part met by the Government's decision to construct a seaplane-carrier at the dockyard. The Commonwealth also arranged with the Government of New South Wales to construct at Walsh Island Dockyard a floating dock capable of lifting a 10,000-ton cruiser, the Commonwealth paying a subsidy of £135,000.

The question of an adequate survey of Australian waters had for some time been concerning the Naval Board. This particularly applied to the Barrier Reef, the previous survey of which had been made between 1843 and 1860. From reports reaching the Naval Board it seemed possible that, because large numbers of Japanese, some of whom were former non-commissioned officers and men of the Japanese Navy, were serving in the pearling fleets, Japan probably had better information as to the Barrier Reef than was possessed by Australia. Limited surveying operations had been in progress since the end of the 1914-18 war, and a Hydrographic Branch had been established in 1921. H.M.S. *Fantome*,² on behalf of the Admiralty, had carried out surveys of Port Stephens and in the Torres Strait area. H.M.A.S. *Geranium*³ had been surveying continuously, according to the season, in northern Australian waters, Queensland and the Barrier Reef, and Tasmania. As a result of the decision to increase the survey work H.M.S. *Silvio* was lent by the Admiralty, was renamed *Moresby*, and commenced a comprehensive survey of the Barrier Reef.⁴

an Australian port". Pointing out that this sum was almost exactly the amount likely to be expendable in Australia upon the actual wages of the men employed in the building of the cruiser, the report went on to say that "this £1,000,000 would be permanently withdrawn from the whole population of the Commonwealth for the immediate but very temporary benefit of a negligible percentage of its population; whereas if this large sum could be saved by the outright purchase of this cruiser from a British shipbuilding firm, it could be made available in its entirety, for the immediate benefit of the same industrial class, for reproductive works from which the whole of the people could permanently benefit; or alternatively could otherwise be usefully employed for defence purposes".

¹ The tender of £1,091,772 for each vessel was for hull and machinery. To that had to be added cost of armament, ammunition, torpedoes, stores, spares etc, £1,292,228 in each case, and approximately £50,000 each cost of passage to Australia, making a total each of £2,434,000 on arrival in Australia. (*Commonwealth Debates*, 11 Sep 1928, Vol 119, p. 6536.) Contract price for hull and machinery of the submarines was £294,396 each, with an additional £145,546 per vessel for other fittings, armament, stores etc, making a total cost of £439,942 each. (*Commonwealth Debates*, 13 Feb 1929, Vol 120, p. 181.)

² HMS *Fantome*, sloop (1901), 1,070 tons, one 3-pdr gun, 13 kts.

³ HMAS *Geranium*, sloop (1915), 1,250 tons, one 4-in gun; 16.5 kts; scrapped 1932.

⁴ HMAS *Moresby*, sloop (1918; refitted and commissioned 20 Jun 1925 under Capt J. A. Edgell, RN, arrived Brisbane 9 Sep 1925), 1,320 tons, one 3-pdr gun, 17 kts; finally disposed of 1947.

A practical demonstration of British naval power and efficiency was provided to the Australian public when on 27th February 1924 the British Special Service Squadron, comprising the battle cruisers *Hood* and *Repulse*⁵ and the light cruisers⁶ *Delhi*, *Danae*, *Dragon*, *Dauntless* and *Dunedin*, under the command of Vice-Admiral Sir Frederick Field, arrived in Australian waters. The squadron spent some weeks visiting Albany, Adelaide, Melbourne, Jervis Bay, Sydney and Brisbane. Ships and crews received a warm welcome, marches being arranged through the cities and a wide round of entertainment being provided. On its departure in April, the squadron was accompanied by H.M.A.S. *Adelaide*, as the result of the arrangement made for the regular exchange of R.A.N. and R.N. cruisers.⁷ *Adelaide* proceeded to the China Station, returning to Australia at the end of April 1925.

The exchange system soon gave rise in Australia to some dissension regarding the activities of H.M.A. Ships overseas and the possibility of their becoming involved in incidents. H.M.A.S. *Brisbane*⁸ relieved *Adelaide* as exchange cruiser on the China Station. While she was there the probability arose of the employment of the squadron in the protection of Europeans in China, where industrial riots had broken out, and there were Opposition protests in Parliament, although little public concern was manifested. In the House of Representatives on 25th June 1925 Mr Bruce said: "It has been suggested that there has been a change in the basis of our defence policy during the last few years. I challenge the statement that anything has been done to undermine the independence of the Australian Fleet." He pointed out that *Brisbane* was with the China Squadron under the exchange agreement, and that H.M.S. *Concord* was with the Australian Squadron, and that while cruisers were exchanged they were under the officers commanding their respective squadrons and must remain there. "The Government has intimated to the British Government that it recognises that during the period of exchange the respective forces are reduced in strength, and that while that condition exists the British Government is entitled to use our cruiser for any necessary operation, the Australian Government at the same time having similar control over the British cruiser." Under arrangement between the two Governments "the Admiral commanding the China Squadron may use the British

⁵ HMS *Repulse*, battle cruiser (1916), 26,500 tons; reconstructed 1936-39, 32,000 tons, six 15-in and twenty 4-in guns, 29 kts; sunk by Jap aircraft, S. China Sea, 10 Dec 1941.

⁶ Completed 1918-19, 4,650 tons, refitted 1929-30, 4,850 tons, six 6-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 29 kts. *Dragon* rendered total constructive loss by human torpedo, off Normandy, 8 Jul 1944. *Dunedin* sunk in Atlantic 24 Nov 1941.

⁷ The principle of cruiser exchange had been arrived at after long consultation with the Admiralty, on the following basis:

- (a) One cruiser of the RAN and one cruiser of the RN to exchange stations annually.
- (b) The program for the RAN cruiser to be so arranged that she could take part in the fleet exercises which are carried out in the spring, a visit being paid to England subsequently.
- (c) Both the RN and the RAN cruisers to be refitted before leaving their own stations.
- (d) The RN cruiser to be oil burning and of such endurance as to be able to cruise with the RAN cruisers.
- (e) Approximate program of RN cruiser: Leave Mediterranean 15 Nov, arrive Aust 1 Jan, leave Aust 1 Jul.
- (f) Approximate program of RAN cruiser: Leave Aust 15 Nov, arrive Mediterranean 1 Jan, join up with Mediterranean Fleet, take part in spring Fleet exercises and then visit England, leave Mediterranean 1 Jul.

⁸ HMAS *Brisbane*, light cruiser (1916), 5,400 tons, eight 6-in guns, 25.5 kts; disposed of 1935.

cruisers and the one Australian cruiser to safeguard British lives and properties, but if further action is contemplated he must get authority of his own Government to use the British cruisers, and that of the Australian Government to use our cruiser. Consequently, the Government has taken no steps to recall the *Brisbane*." The cruiser accordingly completed her term as exchange cruiser, returning to Australia in August 1925. Next year H.M.A.S. *Melbourne* was exchange cruiser, proceeding to the Mediterranean and United Kingdom—the last exchange cruiser for some years, owing to the economic situation.

The question of Australian ships being employed overseas arose again in 1927 when, at the request of the British Government, H.M.A.S. *Adelaide* was dispatched to the Solomon Islands, where there was unrest among the natives on Malaita. Again there were Opposition protests in Parliament, but the Government maintained its previous attitude.

In 1925 Australia was visited by fifty-seven vessels of the combined Atlantic and Pacific United States Fleets, which were on a training cruise under the command of Admiral Robert E. Coontz. Manned by 25,000 officers and men, the fleet was the largest to visit Australia since the American "Great White Fleet" in 1908. It arrived in two sections, at Sydney and Melbourne, on 23rd July, and subsequently called at other ports, ships and crews receiving a welcome which grew with acquaintance from one of moderate warmth to enthusiasm, largely on account of the friendly conduct of the liberty men. Marches took place through the cities, and a series of elaborate entertainments marked the sojourn of the fleet in Australia. At the time, feeling was running high in Japan against the United States, where the American *Immigration Act* of 1924, excluding Japanese completely from entering the country, had been passed by Congress. The visitors were the main features of the Australian newspapers throughout their stay, in pages of pictures and stories, but Press comment on the implications of the visit, both in Australia and overseas, was restrained in tone, the emphasis being on the cordial relations existing between the United States and the British Pacific Dominions and their influence in maintaining peace. (This was in some contrast to both United States and British Press reactions to the visit of the "Great White Fleet" in 1908, when comment was more pointed and, in spite of the existence of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, there was British reference to the "Yellow Peril".) The Melbourne *Argus* pointed a moral by remarking that, while the United States Fleet was in Australia, Admiralty estimates were under fire in the House of Commons, where British Labour's motion for a reduction of the vote of £58,000,000 was defeated. During the course of the debate the First Lord (Mr W. C. Bridgeman) quoted figures showing that out of 329 warships of different kinds laid down by the five great maritime powers since the war, Britain's share was only eleven, "including the two cruisers which Australia was generously laying down".⁹

⁹ Admiralty were having a hard battle at this period to get sufficient money for the construction program. In 1925 both the First Lord and the First Sea Lord (Lord Beatty) had to tender their resignations before the Government agreed to the inclusion of some cruisers in the Naval Estimates.

V

Nineteen twenty-six was an Imperial Conference year, at which Australia was represented by Mr Bruce, the Minister for Defence (Sir Neville Howse) and the Attorney-General (Mr Latham).¹ At this conference Great Britain and the Dominions were first defined as "Autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations". The principle of Dominion navies was stated by the British Prime Minister (Mr Baldwin) to be "not merely accepted, but wholeheartedly endorsed, by the Admiralty". The resolutions on defence adopted at the 1923 conference were re-affirmed. The British Government's decision to resume work on the Singapore Base consequent upon the return to power of the Conservatives in November 1924, had been announced in March of the following year, and the question of Dominions cooperation in the project was raised at the conference. On behalf of Australia, Mr Bruce pointed out that in 1923 Australia's defence policy was not determined, and the Commonwealth would have been prepared sympathetically to consider the question of financial contribution towards Singapore. In 1924 however, with the British Government's decision not to proceed with Singapore, Australia could delay no longer in looking to her own defences, and embarked on the five years' program, a financial commitment which debarred any contribution towards Singapore.

Mr Bruce outlined Australia's defence position, and explained that in the five years' program £36,250,000 was being expended, made up from:

£25,000,000 for ordinary maintenance,

£5,000,000 developmental,

£6,250,000 naval construction (two 10,000-ton cruisers, two submarines, a seaplane-carrier; arms, armament, survey of Barrier Reef, and purchase of aircraft).

Australia's existing naval strength consisted of three cruisers, three destroyers, three sloops and one repair ship in commission; with one cruiser, one flotilla leader, eight destroyers and one sloop in reserve. The strength of the permanent sea-going establishment was 5,000, of whom 10 per cent were on loan from the Royal Navy. Additional permanent service ratings were being enlisted and trained to provide for the manning of the ships under construction. The Federal Government was contributing £135,000 towards the cost of a floating dock capable of accommodating the 10,000-ton cruisers. The figures quoted by Mr Bruce emphasised the lead Australia had taken and maintained among the Dominions in contribution to Imperial Naval Defence.² On his return to Australia, Mr Bruce told Parliament that

¹ Rt Hon Sir John Latham, GCMG. (Lt-Cdr RANR 1917-20.) Chief Justice High Court of Aust 1935-52; Aust Minister to Japan 1940-41. Of Malvern, Vic; b. Ascot Vale, Vic, 25 Aug 1877.

² Naval expenditure per head of population by the peoples of the British Commonwealth for the years 1924-25 and 1925-26 was: Gt Brit, 23s7d, 25s7d; Aust 15s7d, 17s2d; New Zealand, 5s1d, 6s9d; Canada, 8d, 8d; South Africa, 2d, 2d. The Canadian Prime Minister (Mr Mackenzie King)

It was generally recognised at the Conference that of all the Dominions Australia had shown the greatest desire to carry out the principle affirmed at the 1923 Conference, that the primary responsibility of each portion of the Empire represented at the gathering was to attend to its own defence. The present expenditure of the Commonwealth upon defence is greater than the total expenditure of all the other Dominions; but there is, I think, an increasing recognition in the other Dominions of their obligation to provide for their own defence and to contribute also towards the general defence of the Empire and the protection of its trade routes.

The problem of trade protection was a stumbling block in an international naval conference the following year. In February 1927, the President of the United States (Mr Coolidge) invited the other four Washington Treaty powers to a naval conference to discuss the question of limiting the total tonnage of cruisers, flotilla leaders and destroyers, and to try to achieve "security and economy". France and Italy declined the invitation, but Great Britain and Japan accepted, and their representatives met those of the United States at Geneva. Agreement as to the means of achieving limitation in the cruiser classes could not be reached between Great Britain and the United States. Great Britain, needing numbers of light cruisers for trade protection, sought to effect it by a limitation of the size of ships and the calibres of guns. The United States, thinking in terms of long Pacific distances, and heavy cruisers with large endurance and ability to fight fleet actions, stood firm for a limitation of total tonnage. So the conference broke down. It broke down, as Captain A. C. Dewar, R.N., said in "The Geneva Conference and After" (*Brassey's Annual*, 1929) "on the difference between the 8-inch and the 6-inch gun. The Americans wanted size rather than numbers; the British wanted numbers rather than size." The question of parity as between Great Britain and the United States had not worried the Admiralty, but the level on which that parity was to be established was a matter of moment, a point more than once made clear by British spokesmen. "We are not," Ramsay MacDonald said in Washington in 1929, "going to build against America, and anything America does in the way of expanding her fleet will meet with no response from Britain, but if America's building has the effect of compelling other nations to build, then, indirectly, we are compelled to take an interest in America's scheme of building." And later, in 1935, he told Mr Norman Davis, chief United States political delegate at the London Naval Conference of that year: "Parity we of course agree to; but we have the greatest naval responsibility, and it must be parity on a level dictated, not in Washington, but in London."

Australia's five-year developmental program, begun in 1924-25, expired on 30th June 1929, by which time the five vessels—the cruisers *Australia* and *Canberra*, the submarines *Otway* and *Oxley*, and the seaplane carrier

announced at the Conference that Canada's naval policy was one of developing local defence of waters in the vicinity of the coasts and approaches to ports. Establishment was: Permanent, 460 officers and men, Canadians, and 40 borrowed ranks and ratings; RCNVR, 1,000 officers and men; RCNR, 150 officers and men.

*Albatross*³—had been added to H.M.A. Squadron. *Melbourne*, which had carried to Great Britain the ship's company to commission *Canberra*, was paid off there on 23rd April 1928 and broken up the following year. *Sydney* was paid off on 8th May 1928 and broken up at Sydney in 1929, in January of which year *Brisbane* was placed in reserve, to remain there until 1935, when she proceeded to the United Kingdom for disposal. The six "River" class destroyers had been in reserve since 1922.

In 1929 the squadron comprised modern units, and the six "S" class destroyers which had been made available by the Admiralty ten years previously, with various ancillary vessels. The sea-going establishment as compared with that of 1923-24 had been increased by 581, and the strength of the Citizen Naval Forces had risen from 3,118 in 1924-25 to 6,063 in 1928-29. Apart from maintenance of existing property, £342,812 had been spent on adding to shore establishments, and the floating dock under construction at Newcastle, New South Wales, was nearing completion. A continuous surveying program was in progress, and Darwin had been established as an oil fuelling base. There was, however, a check in store for the development of Australia's defence projects. The world-wide economic depression, the full impact of which was to be experienced in 1930, was already making itself felt, and it was to have severe repercussions on the navy, as on the country generally.

VI

The advent of the depression was coincident with that of a Labour administration in Australia, under the leadership of Mr Scullin,⁴ who took office as Prime Minister in 1929, and the influence of the economic situation was apparent in the Governor-General's speech at the opening of the new Parliament in November, in which emphasis lay on the degree of unemployment in Australia and the need for retrenchment in expenditure. References to defence were limited to the announcement of the Government's decision to suspend compulsory military training and to the necessity of a general review of the existing provisions for the defence of the Commonwealth, to which end consultations between ministers and officers of the three Services comprising the Council of Defence had taken place. The speech concluded on the note that the Government warmly supported moves towards disarmament.

No threat of war was apparent. Indeed, in the previous year, fifteen nations—including Australia—had been original signatories to the Paris Pact outlawing war as an instrument of international relations, a pact

³ HMAS *Australia*, cruiser (1928), 10,000 tons, eight 8-in guns, 31.5 kts.

HMAS *Canberra*, cruiser (1928), 10,000 tons, eight 8-in guns, 31.5 kts; lost in action with Japanese at Battle of Savo Island, 9 Aug 1942.

HMAS *Otway*, submarine (1927), 1,354 tons, one 4-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 15.5 kts; given to RN 1932.

HMAS *Oxley*, submarine (1927), 1,354 tons, one 4-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 15.5 kts; given to RN 1932; destroyed by accidental explosion, 10 Sep 1939.

HMAS *Albatross*, seaplane carrier (1928), 4,800 tons, four 4.7-in guns, nine seaplanes, 21 kts; transferred to RN as part payment for cruiser *Hobart*, 1938.

⁴ Rt Hon J. H. Scullin. Prime Minister 1929-32. Of Richmond and Ballarat, Vic; b. Trawalla, Vic, 18 Sep 1876. Died 29 Jan 1953.

ultimately signed by the representatives of fifty-seven nations. But of the four major naval powers, only Britain had reduced naval expenditure, the United States, Japan and France all showing substantial and progressive increases over the three years from 1927 to 1930. The President of the United States, Mr Hoover, in a statement quoted in the Empire Parliamentary Association Report on Foreign Affairs for July and August 1929, pointed out to his people that they should understand "that current expenditure on strictly military activities of the army and navy constitutes the largest military budget of any nation in the world today, and at a time when there is less real danger of extensive disturbance to peace than at any time in more than half a century". Mr Hoover had become President in 1929. In the same year in England, Mr Ramsay MacDonald became Prime Minister for the second time, at the head of a minority Government depending upon Liberal votes. In October Mr MacDonald visited the United States, and as a result of his conferences with the President it was announced that Great Britain would issue invitations to a Five-Power naval disarmament conference to be held in London in January 1930. Representatives of the five powers—the United States, Japan, France, Italy, and the British nations—duly met on 21st January, Australia's representative being the Minister for Customs, Mr J. E. Fenton, who was assisted by the previous First Naval Member, Vice-Admiral Napier,⁵ and by Rear-Admiral Hyde,⁶ who had just completed a term as Rear-Admiral Commanding, the Australian Squadron. The British overseas representatives at the conference for the first time enjoyed the status accorded to them by the Imperial Conference of 1926. An important point was that the approval of the Dominions had been given to a proposal by the British Prime Minister that the British Empire Fleet should be regarded as one unit. Therefore "every request that was made at the conference by the British delegation had behind it the concurrence of the representatives of the British Government and of the overseas dominions . . . other nations have nothing to do with arrangements regarding the disposition of the British Navy among the component parts of the Empire".⁷ But the corollary was that, with the extension of quantitative limitations to auxiliary classes of warships, no overseas Dominion could now increase total Empire naval strength by its contribution, nor build to meet any special requirements of its own outside that total. The strengthening of any specific Empire point entailed robbing Peter to pay Paul.

As a result of the conference the Washington Treaty limitations were extended and added to, and cruisers, destroyers and submarines were brought within the total tonnage and replacement age categories, thus directly affecting the Australian Navy. Broadly, the results were that contracting parties agreed to the deferment until 1936 of the replacement of

⁵ Admiral W. R. Napier, CB, CMG, DSO; RN. Capt 1913; Rear-Adm 1924; First Naval Member 1926-29. B. Portsmouth, Eng, 13 Jun 1877. Died 8 Apr 1951.

⁶ Admiral Sir Francis Hyde, KCB, CVO, CBE. Joined RN and transferred to RAN. Exec Officer *Australia* 1913-15; comd Aust Sqn 1926-29, 3rd Battle Sqn 1930-31; First Naval Member 1931-37. B. Southsea, Portsmouth, Eng, 19 Jul 1877. Died 28 Jul 1937.

⁷ Mr Fenton, report to Parliament. *Commonwealth Debates*, 30 Jul 1930, Vol 126, pp. 4935-43.

capital ships; the total tonnage of different types of ships was settled; certain ships were placed on the scrapping list; and the tonnage and armament of aircraft carriers was further limited, and limits were placed on the tonnage and armament of submarines. The contracting parties were bound to communicate to each other details of ships within the limitation categories—except such as were governed by the Washington Treaty—laid down and building by and for them after the coming into force of the treaty. The British Commonwealth, the United States and Japan, undertook to reduce at once their capital ships in numbers to 15-15-9 respectively. The question of any modification of total tonnage and displacement limits in aircraft carriers was left over until 1935. In other categories, the three major naval powers agreed on:

	British	U.S.A.	Japan
Cruisers: 8-in guns . . .	15 of 146,800	18 of 180,000	12 of 108,400
Cruisers: 6-in guns . . .	192,000	143,000	100,450
Destroyers	150,000	150,000	105,500
Submarines	52,700	52,700	52,700

The treaty was to remain in force until 31st December 1936, and the parties to it were to meet in conference again in 1935. Each of the three major powers made concessions. Great Britain reduced her claims for cruisers from the Geneva figure of 70 to 50. The United States abandoned a claim to equip all their cruisers with 8-inch guns. Japan compromised on her demand for 70 per cent of the British and American cruiser quotas. Complete agreement with France and Italy was not reached. They retained the right to build the capital ships they were entitled—under the Washington Treaty—to lay down in 1927-29, and they accepted no limitation of their freedom of action on the question of number and total tonnage of other vessels. Because of this, the treaty between the three major powers included an “escalator clause” permitting them to increase their naval construction programs if those of the continental European powers exceeded certain limits. As a result of later negotiations between France, Italy and the British Nations, it was announced in March 1931 that those three powers would not replace before 31st December 1936 any cruisers with guns of 6.1-inch calibre or less and destroyers which would be under sixteen years of age on that date. The tonnage of new construction to be completed should not exceed that replaceable in this category before 31st December 1936, and vessels already over age and becoming over age during the period of the treaty should be scrapped on being replaced, except in cases where France or Italy preferred to scrap instead an equivalent tonnage belonging to the category of cruisers with guns of more than 6.1-inch.

The effect on the Australian Navy was that *Australia* and *Canberra* were included in the total of fifteen heavy cruisers allowed to the British Nations, while *Adelaide* and *Brisbane*, the destroyers and submarines, were included in the total tonnage allowed for their respective categories. The replacement age of *Australia* and *Canberra* was fixed at twenty years from their date of completion in 1928; that of *Brisbane* and *Adelaide* at sixteen

years from their completion dates in 1916 and 1922 respectively. The seaplane carrier *Albatross* could be retained without her tonnage coming into a limitation category, but if desired later to replace her, then the replacement tonnage would be charged against the tonnage of the nearest appropriate combat category.

The aim had been for economy and security. "The reduction in battleship construction and of construction in certain other lines," Mr Fenton told Parliament on 30th July 1930, "will represent a saving of between £52,000,000 and £70,000,000 to Great Britain during the next five years. President Hoover has estimated the total saving to the people concerned in the next five or six years will be something like £500,000,000." As to security:

Of this treaty (said Mr Fenton) it can be said that so far as Australia is concerned it does provide for a fleet strength which the expert advisers of the British Admiralty were prepared to accept as sufficient to ensure the safety of our lines of communication in the present international situation. If it had been proposed to extend the term to ten years I doubt whether the British experts would have sanctioned the arrangement. However, unless amended in the meantime, the present agreement remains in force for a period of five years, when circumstances may be reviewed and the strength of the various fleets estimated so that we shall know just what to do.⁸

Two factors now affected the manning—potential and actual—and strength of the Australian Navy. First to be felt was the abolition of compulsory military training in November 1929. At that date the Royal Australian Naval Reserve—hitherto composed of cadets and reservists appropriated for naval training under Part XII of the *Defence Act*—was a force of 7,172 officers and ratings, but within the twelve months following, although most of the officers elected to continue to serve under the volun-

⁸ Views on this matter differed widely. Mr Latham—who had served in the navy as Lt-Cdr, RANR, during the 1914-18 war, and had accompanied the Australian representatives to the 1919 Peace Conference as official adviser to the Minister for the Navy—spoke in Parliament on 7 Aug 1930, about the reduction of Britain's cruiser demand from 70 to 50, saying: "There has been very much criticism in many quarters of this reduction and a considerable degree of uneasiness and apprehension has been caused."

Vice-Admiral Sir William Fisher who, as Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff at Admiralty, was one of the chief advisers to the British delegation at the conference thought the treaty "not at all bad", an opinion concurred in by Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, who congratulated Fisher on having "got us through so amazingly well".

On the other hand, Lord Chatfield contended that the 1930 London treaty placed Britain's naval position "in jeopardy that led the sea security of the Empire to its most dangerous point for 150 years", though he blamed the cruiser position largely on the actions of the previous British Government: "however feeble the 1930 Treaty, the Labour Government did permit the Admiralty to extract out of it a small annual building programme of three light cruisers and one flotilla of destroyers".

In his introduction to Capt Morison's *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Cmdre Dudley W. Knox, USN (ret'd) sees the price of the 1930 agreement as "a substantially lowered American ratio. Counting the American quota of total strength at 5, the British became about 5.2 and the Japanese about 3.25. This because the other powers would agree only to a *status quo* basis which included their recent active building, while we were setting a futile example of restraint." In Japan the agreement created intense opposition, and "in the national outburst of indignation which followed, several Japanese statesmen and financiers were murdered, whilst others were threatened with a similar fate, and for the first time in seventy years Japan experienced a state of internal dissatisfaction and anxiety". (Commander S. Takagi, I.J.N., "Japan and Her Navy", *Brassey's Annual*, 1935, p. 147.)

European comment was luke-warm, coloured by the fear of Anglo-American domination of the world through a naval alliance. Less than a month after the signing of the Treaty, Mussolini told a cheering Fascist gathering at Florence: "I am certain that in order not to remain prisoners of the sea the Italian people are capable of great sacrifices. . . . The new naval programme will be carried out exactly as laid down in 1929, and new ships will be afloat because the fascist will is a will of iron. . . . Though words are beautiful things, machine-guns, ships, aeroplanes, and big guns are still more beautiful. Right is a vain word unless it is accompanied by might."

tary system, the number of ratings decreased from 6,919 to 4,797. In the following year the Government decided on a considerable cut in the defence estimates, amounting in the case of the navy to £326,368 for the 1930-31 fiscal period. As a result, ships in the sea-going squadron were reduced to *Australia*, *Canberra*, and *Albatross* in commission with full complements, and one "S" class destroyer with reduced complement. Other vessels, including *Moresby* and the submarines *Otway* and *Oxley*, were paid off into reserve. These two last-named, in April 1932, were finally paid off, commissioned as H.M. submarines, and departed for the Mediterranean, having been accepted as a free gift by the British Government. During 1930-31, the six "River" class destroyers—*Huon*, *Warrego*, *Torrens*, *Parramatta*, *Swan* and *Yarra*, of the original Australian Fleet—which had been in reserve since 1922, were broken up and, there being now no coal-burning ships in commission, the fleet collier *Biloela* was sold in March 1931. The following year the sloops *Marguerite*, *Geranium* and *Mallow* were turned over to Cockatoo Island Dockyard for scrapping. These steps were accompanied by a drastic cut in the permanent forces involving the reduction of 61 officers and 639 ratings.⁹

Further economies were effected by reductions in the civil staffs at Navy Office and other shore establishments, and by the transfer of the Naval College from Jervis Bay to Flinders Naval Depot, a step taken on the recommendation of the Naval Board after various alternatives had been considered, including the sending of cadets to England for training in the Royal Naval College; the organisation of a Naval Wing at an existing Australian public school; and the amalgamation of the Naval and Military Colleges.¹ During this period the suggestion was more than once raised by Opposition members in Parliament that for reasons of economy the R.A.N. Squadron as a separate unit should be abolished, and a return made to the policy of paying a subsidy to the United Kingdom for naval protection. But the Government refused to countenance this, and nothing came of the suggestion which had, in any case, very little support. Indeed at this stage—as it was again to do later when in power—the

⁹ The reductions were achieved by:

	Officers	Ratings
(i) Reversion to R.N. of personnel on loan	5	76
(ii) Voluntary Discharges	2	380
(iii) Compulsory Discharges	41	83
(iv) Normal wastage, engagements expired, invalided, etc.	13	100

In a statement in Parliament on 12 June 1930, the Minister for Defence (Mr A. Green) said: "A few of the officers and most of the petty officers and men have retired voluntarily. No compensation will be paid in addition to deferred pay." The Naval Board, however, made successful efforts to obtain compensation for officers compulsorily discharged, the Board having "certain responsibilities" to "urge upon the Minister in the strongest possible terms the necessity of obtaining reasonable compensation for officers retrenched"—(Second Naval Member's minute, 2 May 1930). After some delay the terms of discharge were finally announced: Officers were to receive deferred pay without compensation, and were invited to volunteer for full employment in a civil capacity in the Commonwealth Public Service "in the event of any opportunity for such employment offering". Many officers volunteered for civil employment and, after a delay in most instances amounting to twelve months, public service positions were found for them. They were paid half-pay for the period between discharge and appointment to the public service.

¹ Admiral Lord Mountevans, who was Rear-Admiral Commanding, the Australian Squadron, from 1929 to 1931, wrote in his book *Adventurous Life*, "For really expensive college training for the sea, nothing that has come my way compares with the Jervis Bay Naval College in Australia, where it cost annually about £60,000 to maintain the training of 45 cadets! Mr Scullin's Government abolished the college while I commanded the Royal Australian Squadron, and I think they were quite right."

Labour Administration supported the policy of participation in Imperial Defence and the maintenance of an Australian Navy as a contribution towards that defence, Mr Curtin,² speaking in the House of Representatives in the debate on the 1930 London Treaty, saying on 7th August 1930: "I trust that Australia will always recognise that its defence policy should be considered as part of the defence policy of the British Empire. I can see no possibility of Australia being able, within measurable time, to secure itself, out of its own resources, against danger of attack"; a statement in contrast to his Party's expressed policy while in Opposition, and to his own later utterances when Opposition Leader.

The Jervis Bay college was closed at the end of the term on 26th May 1930, and the college reopened at Flinders Naval Depot the following month, thus concentrating the training establishments for officers and ratings in the one area. Entry into the college was suspended for the years commencing January 1931 and 1932, a special entry being taken in September 1932, and normal entry resuming in 1933. Recruiting for the navy practically ceased during 1930-31, but was resumed in 1932, by which year retrenchment had brought the permanent force to the lowest figures in its history with 341 officers, 25 cadets at the College, and 2,776 ratings. One effect was an increase in the proportion of Australians serving, owing to the return to the Royal Navy of officers and ratings on loan; and with the resumption of recruiting in 1932, recruits were of a higher educational standard than formerly, and an excellent standard of efficiency was maintained in spite of there being only four ships in commission.

VII

The economic situation had forced defence retrenchment on Australia. Now developments overseas were to make rearmament necessary. Italy had set the pattern of dictatorship in 1922 with Mussolini's seizure of power. The invasion of Manchuria in 1931 enabled the militarists in Japan to overthrow liberal government. In Germany the National Socialist ferment was rising. Influenced by the portents and the low state of the Empire's defences, the tone of the 1932 annual report of the British Chiefs of Staff was such as to lead the MacDonald Government to abandon the "Ten-Year Rule" in March of that year. The following January Hitler became Chancellor of the Third Reich, and Nazi rule was fastened upon Germany, who withdrew from the Disarmament Conference in October 1933, gave notice of withdrawal from the League of Nations, and proceeded on an overt policy of rearmament.

There had been a change of administration in Australia in 1932, the non-Labour parties being returned to power with Mr Lyons³ as Prime Minister, and with the growing volume of rumblings and clatterings beyond the horizon there arose an increasing demand for the strengthening of

² Rt Hon J. Curtin. Prime Minister and Min for Defence 1941-45. Of Cottesloe, WA; b. Creswick, Vic, 8 Jan 1885. Died 5 Jul 1945.

³ Rt Hon J. A. Lyons, CH. Premier of Tas 1923-28; Prime Minister 1932-39. B. Stanley, Tas, 15 Sep 1879. Died 2 Apr 1939.

the country's defences. The preamble to the Defence Estimates for 1933-34 recognised the "urgent need for certain extensions of our defence activities", and the sum of £280,000 was provided for naval construction, including a sloop—the *Yarra*⁴—to be built at Cockatoo Island. In 1933 the Navy was strengthened by the replacement of the "S" class destroyers by the flotilla leader *Stuart* and the four "V" and "W" class vessels *Vampire*, *Vendetta*, *Voyager* and *Waterhen*, which were made available on loan by the British Government, the "S" class ships being scrapped.⁵ Surveying was resumed this year, *Moresby* being commissioned in April and continuing the work on the Barrier Reef.

Among both parties in Parliament there was agreement as to the need for adequate defence, the main difference being as to method, although there were individuals who objected on principle. Mr Ward⁶ (Labour, East Sydney), for example, told the House of Representatives during the Defence Estimates debate in November 1933 that

As an Australian native with a family in this country, I would be prepared to urge that Australia should not bother about arming to defend herself, because no other country will interfere with her. By doing so she would set an example, as the Scandinavian countries have successfully done, and nobody would interfere with her.

The differences as to method lay between the non-Labour parties' adherence to first reliance on naval defence and the ability of Britain if needs be to base a battle fleet at Singapore; and the Labour party's increasing doubt of that ability, and consequent intensified emphasis on local defence, by air power and a land army backed by industrial strength, of Australia's shores against possible invasion. The problem was to strike a balance.

Meanwhile, the Government continued to build up naval strength, and in April 1934 decided to acquire a modern cruiser—*Sydney*,⁷ then building as H.M.S. *Phaeton* for the Admiralty—to replace *Brisbane*; to recruit 700 men to man the new vessel; and to build a second sloop—*Swan*⁸—at Cockatoo. It was the commencement of a three-year program in a defence policy whose objectives were: "The maintenance of the R.A.N. at a strength which is an effective and fair contribution to Imperial naval

⁴ HMAS *Yarra*, sloop (1936), 1,060 tons, three 4-in AA guns, 16.5 kts; sunk in action in Java Sea, 4 Mar 1942.

⁵ HMAS *Stuart*, flotilla leader (1918), 1,530 tons, five 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 36.5 kts. HMAS *Voyager*, destroyer (1918), 1,100 tons, four 4-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts; lost Timor I, 25 Sep 1942.

HMAS *Vendetta*, destroyer (1917), 1,090 tons, four 4-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts. HMAS *Vampire*, destroyer (1917), 1,090 tons, four 4-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts; lost Jap air attack Bay of Bengal 9 Apr 1942.

HMAS *Waterhen*, destroyer (1918), 1,100 tons, four 4-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts; lost air attack Tobruk ferry run 30 Jun 1941.

After the 1914-18 war the numerous ships of this class were laid up in England under a special maintenance plan by means of which "this valuable mass of destroyers were kept in good order, at three months' notice for sea, commissioning to take their places from time to time, in the active fleet, ready in the event of war for anti-submarine work. The scheme proved all I had hoped, and these ancient warriors were ready for action when the bell rang in 1939." (Chatfield, pp. 18-19.)

⁶ Hon E. J. Ward. Min for Labour and National Service 1941-43, for Transport and External Territories, 1943-49. B. Sydney, 1899.

⁷ HMAS *Sydney* (1935), 6,830 tons, eight 6-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 32.5 knots; lost in action against German raider *Kormoran* Indian Ocean, 19 Nov 1941.

⁸ HMAS *Swan*, sloop (1937), 1,060 tons, three 4-in AA guns, 16.5 kts.

defence; and local defence against invasion and raids"; a program resulting in the navy having in commission by 1937 three cruisers, *Australia*, *Canberra* and *Sydney*; one flotilla leader and two destroyers; two sloops and a survey ship; with an increase of the seagoing forces to a total of 4,290. Other naval provisions included increased repair facilities at Garden Island, the construction and filling of oil fuel tanks at Sydney and Darwin, and the provision of munitions factories and laboratories.

In 1934 preliminary conversations were held in London between the interested powers on the subject of the Washington and London Naval Treaties, both of which were to expire in 1936. At these conversations, Japan's demand for equality of ratios, by the establishment of a "common upper limit", with Great Britain and the United States was unacceptable, and at the end of December 1934 she gave notice of her termination of the Washington Treaty. Subsequently, both she and the United States announced increases in their current shipbuilding programs. In March 1935 the British White Paper on Defence Policy was published, announcing the decision to modernise defences; and the same month Germany announced the official constitution of an air force—a few days later Hitler told the British Foreign Secretary in Berlin that Germany had already reached air parity with Britain—and the adoption of conscription to provide an army of 500,000 men.

The following June Germany proposed a naval agreement with Britain on the basis of a strength 35 per cent of that of the British Fleet. This offer was accepted by the British Government on Admiralty advice, the 35 per cent ratio to govern each category of vessels with one important exception: that while Germany was willing to abolish submarines or to limit their size to any tonnage internationally agreed upon, she must in default of such agreement have a ratio of 45 per cent of Britain's submarine tonnage, with the right to increase submarine strength to parity with Britain if subsequent circumstances rendered it imperative. The London Treaty, which was announced to the House of Commons by the First Lord of the Admiralty on 21st June 1935, was entered into without consultation with France or informing the League of Nations. It thus produced unhappy political results. On the practical side it authorised Germany to build to her utmost capacity for some years to come. It was agreed that the total tonnage of the German Fleet should never exceed a percentage of 35 of the aggregate tonnage of the naval forces, "as defined by treaty", of the British Commonwealth of Nations. But Germany was not party to the provisions of the Washington Treaties or the London Naval Conference, and while Britain, France, and the United States were bound by the 35,000 tons limitation, she did in fact immediately lay down *Bismarck*⁹ and *Tirpitz*¹ of over 40,000 tons. There were inherent in this treaty implications of import to Australia. As Mr Churchill pointed out at the time, as one result of Germany's naval building the British battle

⁹ *Bismarck*, German battleship (1941), 49,947 tons, eight 15-in and twelve 5.9-in guns, 30-35 kts; sunk by British naval forces in N Atlantic, 27 May 1941.

¹ *Tirpitz*, German battleship (1941), 41,700 tons, eight 15-in and twelve 5.9-in guns, 30-35 kts; sunk by British aircraft, 12 Nov 1944.

fleet would be "largely anchored to the North Sea . . . that means to say the whole position in the Far East has been very gravely altered".² Not that this was the extent of the damage done by the treaty. Germany had already covertly achieved air parity with Britain and had adopted conscription. Without a showdown not short of war she could not be prevented from building up a navy in a similar way. The treaty brought the matter into the open. But the damage lay in the acquiescence; in the moral effect on Germany, on Japan and Italy—and on Britain's allies.

Affairs were not propitious for satisfactory agreement at the London Naval Conference which opened in December 1935, and from which Japan withdrew when her proposal of a common upper limit was not accepted. Ultimately agreement was reached between the British Nations, the United States and France, on the following basis: quantitative limitation—of the number of ships—was abolished; qualitative limitation—of the size of ships—was accepted, defining categories of certain classes of ships, in particular limiting capital ships to a maximum displacement of 35,000 tons and guns to a maximum calibre of 14 inches; while aircraft carriers should not exceed 22,000 tons and 6.1-inch guns; and no more 8-inch gun cruisers should be built. Provision was made for direct adherence by Japan and Italy, but neither did adhere. With the abolishing of quantitative limitation the way was cleared for the rebuilding of navies within—so far as parties to the treaty were concerned—the agreed qualitative limits as from 31st December 1936, the date of expiration of the Washington Treaty and the 1930 London Treaty.

The freedom to rebuild the British battle fleet thus achieved brought to a head the controversy which, ever since the 1914-18 war, had grown over the question of the value of the capital ship in the face of air attack. In 1936 the subject was exhaustively examined in Britain by the Capital Ship Committee, who interviewed scores of witnesses—including many convincingly hostile to the capital ship—and finally produced a report which was strongly and unanimously in support of it, thus enabling

² Mr. Churchill, speaking in the House of Commons on the London Treaty in July 1935, pointed out that "so far as the position in the Mediterranean is concerned, it seems to me that we are in for very great difficulties. Certainly a large addition of new shipbuilding must come when the French have to modernise their Fleet to meet German construction and the Italians follow suit, and we shall have pressure upon us to rebuild from that point of view, or else our position in the Mediterranean will be affected. But worst of all is the effect upon our position at the other end of the world, in China and in the Far East. What a windfall this has been to Japan! Observe what the consequences are. The First Lord said, 'Face the facts'. The British Fleet, when this programme is completed, will be largely anchored to the North Sea. That means to say the whole position in the Far East has been very gravely altered, to the detriment of the United States and of Great Britain and to the detriment of China." *The Second World War*, Vol. I, p. 110.

"The London Treaty tacitly freed Germany from some of the restrictions of Versailles and allowed her to proceed with the development of naval power, which, though apparently harmless at the time, laid the foundations of one of the most serious threats in history against Great Britain. The London Treaty was in fact the first act of appeasement from which Hitler rose to attempt the domination of the world." (Anthony Martienssen: *Hitler and His Admirals*, 1948, p. 11.)

Lord Chatfield, who was First Sea Lord at the time, says in *It Might Happen Again*, pp. 73-74, that when Hitler in a speech at Nuremberg announced his recognition of England's right to naval superiority and that he did not desire a naval armaments race, "it was clear to the First Lord and myself, that the wise, indeed the inevitable, course, was to come to an agreement on the matter; to try and bind Germany to this public declaration—not 'enforced on her', but voluntarily made—and so try and stabilize naval construction in Europe and call a halt to secret construction and suspicion. If this was to be effected, it was desirable to accomplish it now, before the opening of the international conference."

the Admiralty to proceed with its building program, the *King George V* class of battleships being laid down. The case for the battleship was summarised by the First Sea Lord—Lord Chatfield³—when he said:

If we rebuild the battle fleet and spend many millions in doing so, and then war comes and the airmen are right, and all our battleships are rapidly destroyed by air attack, our money will have been largely thrown away. But if we do not rebuild it and war comes, and the airmen are wrong and *our* airmen cannot destroy the enemy's capital ships, and they are left to range with impunity on the world's oceans and destroy our convoys, then we shall lose the British Empire.⁴

In the growing tension in international affairs of which, at this stage, Italy was the storm centre, it was hardly to be expected that the Italian Government would ratify the 1936 London naval agreement. On 3rd October 1935 Italy had invaded Abyssinia, who appealed for action by the League of Nations, sanctions against Italy being subsequently imposed. Australia was closely involved, as one of the League Members imposing sanctions, and as having two of her cruisers—*Australia* which was on exchange duty with the Royal Navy, and *Sydney* which, on her way out to Australia as a new ship, was made available to the Royal Navy—in the Mediterranean.⁵ Relations between Britain and Italy became very strained, with the result that Britain reinforced the Mediterranean Fleet, both to safeguard communications through that sea and the Suez Canal, and to implement a guarantee she had given to certain of the Mediterranean powers to come to their assistance in the event of their being attacked on account of their imposition of sanctions under the League Covenant. In Parliament, Opposition demands were made for the return to Australia of the ships in the Mediterranean “decoyed there by Imperial intrigue” (Mr Beasley⁶) but the motion was defeated and there was no popular outside support. Both cruisers remained throughout the crisis, and until the dispersal of the fleet in July 1936. They gained valuable experience and had an enjoyable time with the Mediterranean Fleet, creating an excellent impression and with fine Fleet sporting records. *Australia* won, among other events, the Cruisers' Regatta two years in succession, which “had not been accomplished for something like sixty years”. The ships received a rousing send-off from the Fleet on their final departure from Alexandria, and from the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir William

³ Adm of Fleet Rt Hon Lord Chatfield, GCB, OM, KCMG, CVO. First Sea Lord and Ch of Naval Staff 1933-38; Minister for Co-ord of Defence 1939-40. B. 27 Sep 1873.

⁴ Those who had condemned the battleship on the score of its cost as compared with that of the aeroplane received a surprise when authentic figures were produced to the committee. The Admiralty made a calculation that there could be built and maintained over a period of time, including the overhead charges on each side, about 45 medium bombers for one battleship. The Air Ministry, making a similar calculation, concluded that 37 would represent a fair approximation. Eventually the number was fixed at 43. “These figures,” says Lord Chatfield, “were put before the critics when giving their evidence and of course dumbfounded them. The Committee was also dumbfounded.” The Capital Ship Committee consisted of the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, Sir Thomas Inskip (Chairman), Viscount Halifax, Lord Runciman, and Mr Malcolm MacDonald.

⁵ This was the first exchange of cruisers since 1926. In December 1934 *Australia* exchanged with *Sussex*, which had brought the Duke of Gloucester to Australia for the Melbourne Centenary Celebrations. *Australia* returned the Duke to England, proceeding via Wellington, Panama, Jamaica and the Bahamas, and subsequently joining the Mediterranean Fleet. *Sussex*, before her term with the Australian Squadron had expired, was recalled to the Royal Navy on account of the Mediterranean crisis.

⁶ Rt Hon J. A. Beasley, Min for Supply and Shipping 1941-45, for Defence 1945; High Commr for Aust in London 1946-49. B. Werribee, Vic, 9 Nov 1895. Died 2 Sep 1949.

Fisher,⁷ the signal: "I hope it will not be long before the normal exchange of ships will again bring the Australian Jack to Mediterranean waters. Whether it is you or your successors there will always be a warm welcome waiting you."⁸

VIII

With the conclusion of Australia's three-year defence program, the Estimates for 1936-37 provided for the first year of a new program, the amount allocated for defence being £8,783,070—the largest outlay in any year since the 1914-18 war, the Navy's share being £3,237,387. In the debate on the Estimates the views of the parties in Parliament were again demonstrated in lucid speeches by the Minister for Defence, Mr Archdale Parkhill,⁹ and the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Curtin. Mr Parkhill, reiterating the Government's view that the defence of the British Commonwealth remained essentially naval, pointed out that although Britain's old two-power standard no longer existed, yet, leaving the United States out of it, and "taking into consideration the fleets of the rest of the world, we know the standard of British naval strength contemplated will provide a deterrent against aggression and afford naval protection of all parts of the Empire territories in both hemispheres". In support of this, Mr Parkhill quoted a statement by the First Sea Lord when giving the policy of the United Kingdom Government on Japan's proposal for a common upper limit for the naval forces of the leading powers: "In estimating our requirements we have to take into account responsibilities in European waters, and in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. These imply the necessity for a fleet of sufficient strength to be able to dispose simultaneously in more than one area forces adequate to meet all reasonable defensive needs." Mr Parkhill, concluding with the statement that the Government stood for cooperation in Imperial defence since "no dominion is capable of providing absolutely for its security by its own efforts alone", made a plea for consideration of the Government's case "as the policies of the Government and the Opposition are in essential agreement on the aspect of home or local defence".

In his reply, Mr Curtin emphasised that Singapore could not be regarded as a means of Australia's defence except in conjunction with a fleet based on it. The provision of such a fleet was beyond Australia's capabilities, and the Opposition doubted Britain's ability—and possible readiness—to dispatch such a fleet in the event of a European war. "That is our case. The dependence of Australia upon the competence, let alone the readiness, of British statesmen to send forces to our aid is too dangerous a hazard

⁷ Admiral Sir William Fisher, GCB, GCVO; RN. Comd HMS *St Vincent* at Jutland; Dir A/S Div, Admiralty, 1917-18; C-in-C Medit Fleet 1932-36. B. Hampshire, Eng, 26 Mar 1875. Died 24 Jun 1937.

⁸ During April the Australian ships visited Gallipoli, Turkish officials and War Graves Commission representatives welcoming them, and the ships' companies landing to inspect the battlefields and lay wreaths in the cemeteries. They eventually sailed from Alexandria on 14 July 1936, and arrived in Australia in August.

⁹ Hon Sir Archdale Parkhill, KCMG. Min for Defence 1934-37. B. Paddington, NSW, 27 Aug 1879. Died 3 Oct 1947.

upon which to found Australia's defence policy."¹ Mr Curtin discussed the scales of attack which might be anticipated, from minor raids to attempted invasion, and expressed the Opposition view that "a really effective system of Imperial Defence with the R.A.N. as a unit thereof" did not meet requirements for Australia's safety, and that local defence must supplement it; that a deterrent to all scales of possible attack was best to be found in a strong air force and land army; and that "the true basis of Australian defence should be the development of our industrial capacity to supply every requirement of the forces we may seek to put into the field". He concluded with his party's belief that "there are two main principles of a peace policy; the first is that nations should not be provocative; and the other that they should resort to war only when no alternative offers".²

Labour's fears as to Britain's ability to base a fleet upon Singapore, and doubts as to Singapore's value in Australian defence were—as events showed—well founded. But the same could not be said of a defence policy which ignored the lessons of history, to be repeated during the ensuing years, that to await an invasion by sea with dependence solely upon land-based forces is fatal to the defender when the invader has control of the oceans; a fact no less true of an island continent than of an isolated base such as Singapore. Circumstances had forced upon Britain the abandonment of a two-power naval standard by which alone a measure of security in all events could be achieved. By substituting for that standard a system of collective security and alliances she—and the British Nations—had given a hostage to fortune, and in this Australia had acquiesced, Labour no less than non-Labour. Successive Australian Governments had accepted official assurances of Britain's ability, in spite of changed circumstances, to defend the Empire's sea communications with the cooperation of the Dominions; and, including that of Mr Scullin's Labour administration, had adhered—undoubtedly rightly—to the view that the security of the British Nations depended on that defence. This being so, in endeavouring to arrive at a balanced Australian defence policy, defence of sea communications was the first line. This was none-the-less true although such defence could not now be accounted as secure as in the days of a two-power British Navy. Undoubtedly, as Mr Curtin said, local defence must supplement defence of sea communications, and the Government, while not slackening its naval program, now gave increasing attention to such local defence, including the development of Australia's industrial capacity for war purposes. But by the nature of Australia's geographic position, an island linked by oceans to friends and foes alike, a supplement

¹ Mr Curtin had some British authority for this view, and quoted Admiral Sir Richard Webb as having said: "We are not only an Asiatic power in the widest sense, but also a European country with all Europe's complicated troubles and responsibilities at her door. That being so, to imagine that we are going to uncover the heart of the Empire and send our fleet or the best part of it thousands of miles into the Pacific with only one base for our supplies and damaged ships is to write us down as something more than fools. The British people would not tolerate it."

² But no one country, or group of countries, could rely upon those principles while others failed to embrace them. On 22 Aug 1939, on the eve of his invasion of Poland, Hitler told his service chiefs: "We need not be afraid of a blockade. I am only afraid that at the last minute some *Schweinhund* will make a proposal for mediation." Martienssen, p. 19.

could not become a substitute, and the ocean links remained her first line of defence, and that of the Commonwealth of Nations of which she was a part.

Recognition of this fact was reaffirmed at the 1937 Imperial Conference—the first since 1930—and the resolution of 1923, that it was the sole responsibility of each of the several parliaments of the Commonwealth to decide the nature and scope of its own defence policy was again emphasised. Control of sea communications in the Far East depended upon the presence at Singapore if needed of an adequate fleet, and assurance that such a fleet would proceed there in emergency was again forthcoming. At the request of the Australian delegation—which consisted of Mr Lyons, Sir Archdale Parkhill, Mr R. G. Casey³ and Mr S. M. Bruce—a categorical answer was given to the question as to whether Australia stood in danger of Japanese invasion, it being: “With the naval forces of the British Empire at their present strength, and maintained in the future . . . His Majesty’s Government in Australia need not regard the danger of invasion as a real one”, and the delegation was advised that the scale of attack to be adopted as the basis for defence measures by Australia against sea-borne land raids should be attack by raiding parties landed from war and/or merchant vessels. To meet such a scale of attack, the advice given to Australia by the Committee of Imperial Defence and the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee at the conference was to the effect that Australia should provide forces for the defence of trade in Australian waters and as a deterrent against sea-borne attack, that she should complete the seaward defences of the principal harbours, and in addition build up fuel storage, armament stores, and wireless stations.

In the Imperial Conference debate in the Australian Parliament on 24th August 1937 Mr Lyons put the case for the Government’s policy of first-line naval defence in the concluding lines of his speech:

The Government has reached the conclusion that the first line of security against invasion is naval defence, with the army and air force supplementing and cooperating. If the enemy attempts aggression and must be resisted, it is far preferable to fight him away from our shores than when he is seeking to land on our coasts or has actually established himself in our territory. If the Empire’s naval defence be reduced to impotence the army and air force will not furnish the means of preventing our being brought to terms by a powerful aggressor possessing command of the sea. If the enemy also had powerful land and air forces, these and his free access to the world’s resources of supplies would present us with a formidable military task. Finally, it is outstanding in military history that the future of overseas territories has always been decided by the outcome of war in the main theatre. In the case of Australia, that means the struggle between the British and enemy fleets for the control of sea communications.

The advice received at the Imperial Conference, and the increasing threats to peace overseas, led to a greatly expanded defence program in Australia. Estimates for 1937-38 provided for increased armour in

³ Rt Hon R. G. Casey, CH, DSO, MC. (1st AIF: GSO2 Aust Corps.) Min for Supply and Develop 1939-40, 1949-50. UK Minister of State in Middle East 1942-43, Governor of Bengal 1944-46, Min for National Defence 1950-51, for External Affrs since 1951. Of Melbourne; Brisbane, 29 Aug 1890.

the two 8-inch gun cruisers, with an immediate start being made on *Australia*—her crew meanwhile to commission *Albatross* and *Voyager*—and the conversion of *Adelaide* to oil fuel, in addition to the erection of additional oil fuel storage tanks, and long-range wireless stations.

In July 1937 Japan invaded China, and from then on relations with her steadily deteriorated. In March 1938 the three signatories to the 1936 London Treaty announced their intention to abrogate the limits of 35,000 tons for battleships and 14 inches for guns, the action being taken as a result of the Japanese Government's refusal to deny rumours that ships exceeding those limits were being built in Japan. After discussion between them, the United States, the British Nations and France signed an agreement fixing new limits at 45,000 tons and 16-inch guns. In March, also, Britain accelerated her rearmament program, and naval estimates presented to the House of Commons amounted to £123,700,000. The following month Mr Lyons announced a further three-year Australian defence program totalling £43,000,000, of which £24,800,000 would be new expenditure and £18,200,000 for maintenance of existing defence services. The naval program provided for two additional cruisers of the *Sydney* type, which were built in 1936 and were in commission in the Royal Navy, the first to arrive in Australia in 1938 and the second the following year. The seaplane-carrier *Albatross* was to be transferred to the Royal Navy as part payment for the cruisers. Two additional sloops of the *Yarra* class were to be built at Cockatoo Island, and to be completed early in 1940; and it was later announced that the building of modern destroyers of the *Tribal* class would be undertaken in Australia, and two were ordered in January 1939.

IX

The years 1938 and 1939, with the rising tide of aggression by Germany and Italy in Europe and the growing hostility of Japan in the Pacific, culminating in the apparent weakness of Britain disclosed by the Munich crisis, were marked in Australia by increasing apprehension as to her security in the event of war, not only from raids on her sea communications and coasts, but from invasion. The Singapore base was officially opened early in 1939, but lacked its *raison d'être* and the foundation upon which the whole system of Australian defence was built—a battle fleet to exercise control of the sea in the Western Pacific. Doubts as to Britain's ability to send such a fleet out were increasingly expressed both in Britain and the Commonwealth, in the Press, by politicians, and by speakers of naval and military experience whose words carried weight. As one result there was considerable discussion, in Australian Government and Service circles as well as in newspaper articles and letters to the Press, as to the desirability and possibility of Australia acquiring one or more capital ships.

The matter was first raised in an Admiralty memorandum of 1937, which suggested that Australia should build a capital ship, and the question was discussed at a meeting of the Council of Defence in December of that

year. The Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice-Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin,⁴ remarking that Australia's naval program was based primarily on the advice given by the Committee of Imperial Defence and the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee at the 1937 Imperial Conference, stated that while there was no doubt that the Admiralty would welcome the addition of a battleship in Australian waters, and that the strategical effect of such a ship would be enormous either as an offensive threat or in the defence of Australia, it would cost over £7,000,000 sterling, and would need the provision of an accompanying flotilla of destroyers in addition to repair and docking facilities, all of which would possibly be beyond Australia's budgetary powers. He added that he was of the opinion that for the defence of Australia's trade an adequate number of cruisers was most essential. He still adhered firmly to these views in September 1938,⁵ when he said that if a greater contribution by Australia to Imperial defence were desired, the building of a capital ship would probably be the best form it could take, "but by no means at the expense of any item in the existing program. At the most one cruiser of the existing program might be relinquished when a capital ship joins the R.A.N."

At this time discussions were proceeding with the Admiralty for the stationing at Singapore of a capital ship which would spend part of its time in Australian waters, where adequate docking facilities would thus become desirable. A proposal for the construction in Australia of a graving dock was brought before the Cabinet in December 1938, and approved in principle. Protracted negotiations with the Admiralty followed the initial consideration by the Cabinet, during which the possibility of securing from England the Southampton floating dock belonging to the Southern Railway was explored. A tempting factor was the difference in cost and apparent saving, the price quoted for the floating dock being in the vicinity of £175,000 as against an estimated £3,000,000 for a graving dock. Colvin was opposed to the floating dock on the grounds of its limited life, high maintenance costs, expense and risk of towing to Australia, and failure to meet the recommended draft; though he expressed the opinion that it would meet emergency requirements. The Admiralty view, sought by the Naval Board, coincided with his; and they furthermore informed the Naval Board, in March 1939, that they had been considering the acquisition of the Southampton dock for the Eastern Mediterranean where, from an Imperial point of view, a dock capable of taking a battleship was a more urgent requirement than one in Australia. The Admiralty purchase was, in fact, made later in the year, the Southampton dock leaving England in tow on the 24th June, and arriving at Alexandria a month later. On receiving the Admiralty's views the Cabinet obtained the services of Sir Leopold Savile of Alexander Gibb and Partner—a consulting firm recommended by the Admiralty—to visit Australia and report on the site of a

⁴ Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin, KBE, CB. Entered RN 1896. (With Grand Fleet 1914-18, in *Revenge* at Jutland.) Naval Attaché China and Japan 1922-24; President RN Coll, Greenwich, 1934-37; First Naval Member Aust Naval Board 1937-41; Naval Adviser to High Commr for Aust in London 1942-44. B. 7 May 1882. Died 22 Feb 1954.

⁵ Memorandum from CNS to Minister, 12 Sep 1938.

graving dock. Savile, a senior principal of the firm and a former Civil Engineer-in-Chief of the Admiralty, had been responsible for the Singapore Base. He arrived in Australia to examine sites in June 1939.

Meanwhile renewed assurances of Britain's ability to send a fleet to Singapore in an emergency were given. In December 1938, in answer to a question in the House of Commons, Mr Shakespeare, Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, replied:

The Australian Commonwealth looked to Great Britain to station at Singapore in an emergency a fleet strong enough to safeguard the Empire's interests. That is an accurate statement of the position.⁶

But Australian disquietude grew, and in March 1939 the Naval Board, in a letter to the Minister for Defence, expressed their concern at the confusion and misapprehension in the public mind regarding the basis of Australian defence "as reflected in articles and letters to the press and even by the public utterances of some Cabinet Ministers". Remarking that much of this appeared to arise from the fear that Great Britain would be unable to base a capital ship force at Singapore in the event of war, the Naval Board referred to the adequate assurances on that subject given by Great Britain, as stated by the Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, whose statements were endorsed by Cabinet Ministers in England; and went on to say that if Britain lost command of the sea in Eastern waters Australia would be laid open to invasion. It could not then be supposed that she could oppose with any hope of success a first class power such as Japan with her 70 millions of population.

To speak therefore [the letter stated] of a policy of defence against invasion is in the opinion of the Naval Board to arouse false hopes and to mislead the public. The problem of the defence of Australia at present bears a remarkable similarity to that of the defence of Great Britain before the introduction of the air factor. It is a problem confined almost entirely to the control of sea communications. That an army of reasonable strength and great mobility is necessary to deal with raids and for such purposes as the Government may determine the Naval Board agrees, but on the size and equipment of such an army they do not presume to offer an opinion. The Naval Board submit that the essential requirements of Australian defence are a Navy to maintain, in conjunction with the Air Force, the control of sea communications, an Army adequate to deal with raids, and an Air Force strong enough to cooperate with the Army and locate and attack raiders by land or sea. The Naval Board submit this was and is the basis of policy noted by the Defence Council on 17 December 1937 as having been adopted and put into effect by the Government. The Naval Board would view with grave concern any departure from these principles and the dangerous lack of balance in the Government's programme which would result therefrom. The Naval Board observe that the control of sea communications in Australian waters, which is in their view and with certain exceptions reasonably provided for by the Navy and Air programmes of the Government, must depend basically on the strength of the British Fleet.

The letter went on to point out that though the R.A.N. could be expected, under cover of a force of capital ships in Eastern waters, to relieve Great Britain of the burden of protection of trade and territory in Australia, it was not of sufficient strength to contribute to that covering

⁶ *Argus* (Melbourne), 23 Dec 1938.

force; and to recommend that, to enable it to contribute to the covering force, Australia should acquire and maintain a capital ship and provide a dock for her maintenance. In conclusion, the Naval Board suggested that the basis of defence policy of Australia should again be reviewed by the Defence Council at an early date.

The review was subsequently made, and was embodied in a report by the Chiefs of Staff dated 27th May 1939. The report stated that in view of the assurances received from the United Kingdom Government regarding the dispatch of a fleet to Singapore and the ability of Singapore to hold out,⁷ it was not necessary to attempt preparations to meet invasion, but that the scale of attack to be prepared for should be medium scale attacks, i.e. attacks on shipping combined with heavy raids on territory in the nature of a combined operation by naval, air and land forces, instead of minor attacks on shipping combined with light raids on territory, on which defence plans were based. As to the medium scale, the report stated:

The Royal Australian Navy is far below the strength required to meet this scale of attack. For the medium scale the following naval forces additional to those already included in the expansion program are required: (a) an additional modern capital ship and four attendant destroyers (making a total of two capital ships); (b) four modified Tribals (making a total of six Tribals); (c) an amended mining program; (d) additional personnel, establishments and facilities for maintenance.

The Naval Board letter recapitulated the defence policy which had been accepted by Australia at the 1923 Imperial Conference, and had since been reaffirmed by successive Governments and Imperial Conferences; a policy to meet a problem "confined almost entirely to the control of sea communications". That policy hinged upon the ability of the British Fleet to control the seas in time of war, and to afford dependable cover against possible attack by an enemy capital ship force. Such cover could be effective from a distance while no immediate local threat developed. In the case of such a threat, however, Australia relied upon the timely provision of a British battle fleet at Singapore to ensure her security, and assurances that such provision would be forthcoming had been repeatedly given. But in May 1939 the Admiralty informed the United States Navy Department that, if Britain were at war with Germany and Italy in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, it might be impossible to send British naval reinforcements

⁷ "In 1921 it was decided to build a naval base at Singapore, and all subsequent defence arrangements hinged on its protection against attack by sea, air, or land. . . . At that time, and for many years to come, it was considered that the security of the base depended ultimately on the ability of the British Fleet to control the sea approaches to Singapore. As soon as it arrived it would deal with any Japanese sea forces in the vicinity and cut the communications of any land or air forces that might have installed themselves in the neighbourhood. It was the duty of the land and air forces of the garrison to hold off the enemy forces until the British came. This period, 'the period before relief', was first estimated at seventy days, it being assumed that the enemy forces started from Japan, since at the time Japan had not begun to expand into China and beyond. With such a relatively short time available to them before the arrival of our Fleet, the most likely form of Japanese attack was held to be a *coup de main* direct on the island. Defences were planned accordingly and only a comparatively small garrison was needed. . . . In 1937 the general position was again fully reviewed, and an assessment made of defence requirements based on two main assumptions: (a) that any threat to our interests would be seaborne; (b) that we should be able to send to the Far East within three months a fleet of sufficient strength to protect the Dominions and India and give cover to our communications in the Indian Ocean. In essence there was little change between the view taken in 1937 and that of 1921, but in 1939 the 'period before relief' was raised to one hundred and eighty days, authority was given for reserves to be accumulated on the extended scale, and a reinforcing infantry brigade was sent from India."

Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol IV (1951), Appendix D, Singapore Defences, Memorandum by Lieut-General Sir Henry Pownall, pp. 855-9.

to Singapore, and suggested that the United States Navy should undertake the defence of the Malay Barrier. No decision on this suggestion was reached at the time.⁸

Apparently neither the Australian Government nor the Naval Board was aware of this British communication to the United States. There is little doubt that it was dictated by the speeding procession of events, and by the suddenly seen imminence of a war which many of the best authorities, British and German, had calculated as still some time distant.⁹ With the first of her rearmament battleships of the *King George V* class more than twelve months from contract completion date, and with a number of her existing battleships ill-equipped for modern naval warfare, Britain was not in the best position to conduct such warfare should it eventuate simultaneously against Germany, Italy, and Japan; but probably the approach to Washington was made in order to test the United States attitude rather than to express a policy. Be that as it may, on the eve of war in 1939 the keystone of Australian naval defence—as of Imperial naval defence in the Far East—rested upon the uncertainties of the attitudes of Japan on the one hand and the United States of America on the other; and, in the event of developments unfavourable to Britain in those attitudes, on the ability and readiness of Britain to make such sacrifices as might be necessary—with all they involved—in other ocean areas, to send a fleet to Singapore.

As to the proposal that Australia should acquire a battleship or battleships, that was of a long term plan which was overtaken and nullified by events. None suitable was in existence for purchase, and even had building facilities been available four or five years must elapse before a battleship could be completed. Britain, on the eve of war, had four of her fifteen capital ships being reconstructed, three out of commission simultaneously, and one still uncompleted in 1939.

During the last three years of my time as First Sea Lord—1935-38 (wrote Lord Chatfield)—I had continuous anxiety because we had only twelve available battleships. In crisis after crisis, this hampered the Admiralty and, indeed, the Cabinet in their foreign policy, and the Dominions especially felt the weakness of the Fleet. I used to go to the dockyards where these great ships lay, with their masts and funnels out, looking—as indeed they were—hulks, and I wondered if the very Empire might be jeopardised because they were to be out of action for another year or more.

⁸ "The Admiralty sent secretly to Washington in May 1939 an officer of the Plans Division (Commander Hampton, RN) who participated with the British Naval Attaché (Captain Curzon-Howe, RN) in discussions with the Chief of the Naval Operations (Admiral Leahy) and the Head of the Plans Staff (Rear-Admiral R. L. Ghormley) on the disposition of the naval forces of the two countries in the event of war. If Great Britain were at war with Germany and Italy in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, it might be impossible for the British Navy to send reinforcements to Singapore. In this event, command of the western and southern Atlantic as well as of the Pacific would have to be assured by the United States fleet. This would necessitate also arrangements for cooperation between British and American naval forces. Admiral Leahy agreed that if the United States were forced into the war by an Axis attack, cooperation between the two navies must be assured." Admiralty version of this phase of the pre-war U.S.-U.K. discussions. (Capt T. C. Hampton later served in *Warspite* on staff of C-in-C Medit; while in command of cruiser *Carlisle* he was killed in action 22 May 1941. Capt L. C. A. St J. Curzon-Howe, MVO, commanded cruiser *Mauritius* 1940-41; he died 21 Feb 1941.)

⁹ As late as the beginning of 1939, Hitler was assuring the German Naval C-in-C, Raeder, that he need not reckon with a war against England before 1944 at the earliest. (Vice-Adm K. Assmann, *Headline Diary*; Vice-Adm Assmann and Vice-Adm W. Gladisch, *Aspects of the German Naval War*. Issued by the British Admiralty.)

And within a few days after the outbreak of war Mr Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, was suspending work "upon all except the first three or perhaps four of the new battleships" and not worrying about vessels that could not come into action until 1942, in order to bring forward the smaller anti-U-boat fleet, in which numbers were vital.¹

So any hope that Australia might have had of acquiring a capital ship died with the outbreak of war. In the years since 1918 there had been a striving for peace by conference and agreement, and the price paid by the British nations was the weakening of the naval defences upon which they of necessity depended and which now, with war impending, were stretched to a dangerous degree. Within the framework of Imperial defence, as agreed upon at the various Imperial Conferences, Australia had done what was asked of her. Within the framework of the naval treaties, and the limited time and building facilities available subsequent to their abrogation, she could have done little more in the provision of additional ships. With rearmament, the first thing to be done was to build up a reasonably adequate cruiser and small ship force in a short time, and there can be no question as to the rightness of Admiral Colvin's insistence on adhering to that policy and to treat the question of battleship acquisition as a long-term project.

As it was, the advent of war found Australia with an effective force of two 8-inch gun and four 6-inch gun cruisers, five destroyers, and two sloops; almost wholly manned by Australians, well-trained, keen, and soon to prove themselves efficient. While the *status quo* in the Pacific was maintained this force was, even without a British fleet at Singapore, equal to the task for which it had been designed.

¹ Chatfield, p. 123. Churchill, Vol I, pp. 356-7, 366-7, 579.

CHAPTER 2

THE EVE OF WAR

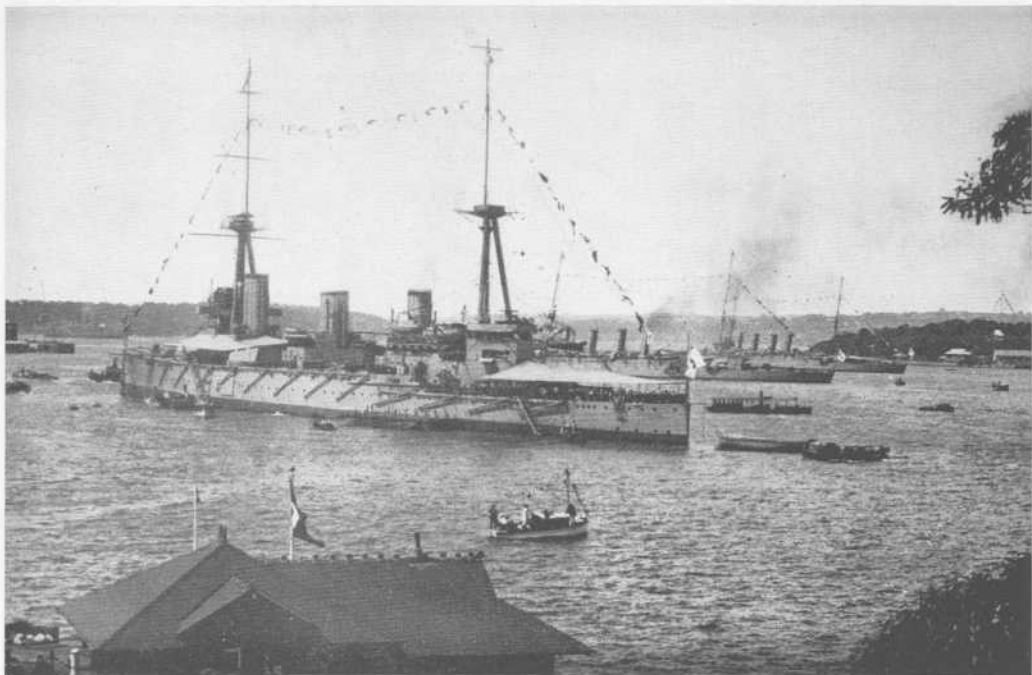
IN the war of 1939-45 the foundation of Britain's sea power was, as in previous wars, her battle fleets in European waters. By their presence, and the implied ability so to dispose their forces as to meet threats in other parts of the world, they controlled, or at any rate influenced, the activities of hostile or possibly-hostile battle fleets elsewhere. Their existence, even on the other side of the world, afforded a measure of security to Australia, under cover of which her own naval forces could look to the country's local defences against seaborne raids on trade and territory. Also under the long-arm protection of the battle fleets, the Royal Navy's auxiliary forces would, in time of war, be disposed to protect trade, an activity in which the Royal Australian Navy was, by arrangement with the Admiralty, committed to participate outside the limits of the Australia Station.¹ This was only equitable, since the defence of the country's trade routes could not be ensured solely by guarding them within those limits, their vulnerability, and therefore Australia's vulnerability in regard to her sea communications, extending over their entire length.

Situated at the junction of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, which occurs at her south-eastern extremity, Australia occupies an important strategical position on the world's main ocean routes. That ocean junction point, off Cape Howe, the coastal boundary between New South Wales and Victoria, is one of the world's focal points in sea communications. In addition to the overseas roads which converge upon it, by far the greater part of Australia's extensive coastwise trade is concentrated on the south-east coast of the continent. In the years immediately before the outbreak of war, Australia's overseas trade was valued at a little over £250 millions annually, while the annual value of her seaborne interstate and intrastate trades was slightly in excess of the overseas.

On the far-reaching overseas road to the westward, Australia was mainly concerned in the safety of the Mediterranean route and with the situation vis-à-vis Egypt, key to the Suez Canal. In August 1936, after protracted and difficult negotiations, a Treaty of Alliance had been concluded between Egypt and Great Britain by which the security of Empire communications through the Canal was safeguarded; a point upon which Australia had been insistent.² Under the terms of the treaty, Britain had the right to station

¹ Dispositions of the Empire naval forces worked out during the peace years, called for the RAN to make available two cruisers immediately on the outbreak of hostilities in the European theatre, one to be allotted to the West Indies Station, the other to the Mediterranean, the proposed preliminary disposition of the RAN being subject to the Commonwealth Government's approval, and not purely to the Naval Board's discretion.

² Australia's interests in the Mediterranean, and her views regarding safeguards of those interests, were more than once emphasised during the treaty negotiations. Mr Bruce, when Prime Minister in 1929, told the House of Representatives: "We have made it clear that no treaty would be acceptable to Australia which did not adequately and absolutely safeguard the Suez Canal. . . . We are prepared to acquiesce in the making of a treaty, but only subject to our final determination that provision for the protection of the Canal is absolutely satisfactory and adequate." The Commonwealth was represented at the signing of the treaty in London in 1936 by Mr S. G. McFarlane, Official Secretary at Australia House.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

The First H.M.A.S's *Australia*, *Sydney* and *Melbourne* at Farm Cove, Sydney, December 1921.



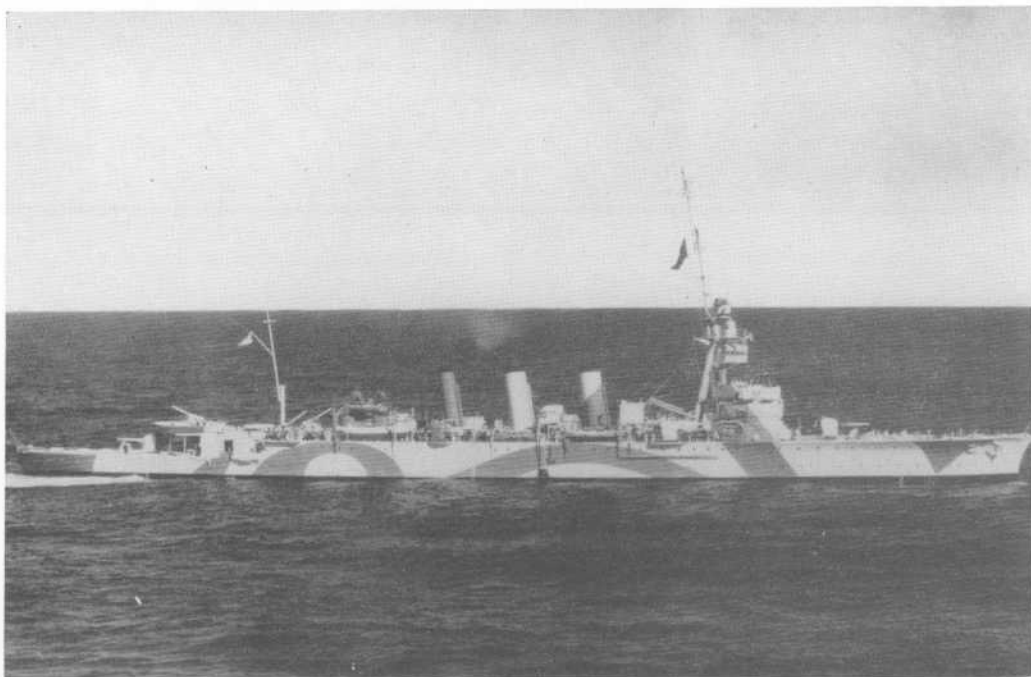
(R.A.N. Historical Section)

The Second H.M.A.S. *Australia*.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

H.M.A.S. *Hobart*.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

H.M.A.S. *Adelaide*.

troops in Egypt for the defence of the Canal, and to use Alexandria as a naval base, while she undertook to assist in Egypt's defence in time of war.

For the further defence of the Mediterranean route, as of that to the westward by the Cape of Good Hope, reliance was placed upon the various British naval forces disposed to meet such threats as might arise, these forces operating under cover of the main battle fleets; in the Atlantic Ocean, of the Home Fleet based on Great Britain; in the Mediterranean and in the Indian Ocean, of the Mediterranean Fleet. For the main defence of the road to the eastward across the Pacific, Australia depended upon Singapore and its promised battle fleet to counter any large-scale threat from the north. Of the development of such a threat some notice could be anticipated, sufficient to enable dispositions to be made; while the interest of the United States in the Pacific, and the uncertainty of her attitude in events portending a change in the *status quo* in that ocean, could be taken into account as a possible deterrent to aggression.

With the exception of H.M.A.S. *Perth*,³ which, having commissioned in England in June 1939, was in the western Atlantic on her way to Australia, all units of the Royal Australian Navy were in Australian waters on the eve of war. The cruisers *Australia* and *Adelaide*, and the destroyers *Stuart* and *Waterhen* were not commissioned, but could quickly be brought to effective state.

A considerable reserve of merchant tonnage which could be drawn upon for naval duties existed in the ships of the interstate and intrastate trades, of which in 1939 there were 154 in service. A large proportion of these were small or medium-sized vessels which could be adapted for patrol duties, anti-submarine, minesweeping, and examination work. But the coastal fleet included also six modern passenger liners of approximately 10,000 tons gross tonnage and with good endurance and moderate speed, which could be used as armed merchant cruisers.

Most of the vessels in the Australian coastwise trade were capable of deep sea work. Port-to-port distances on the coast are long,⁴ and on various of the routes heavy weather and big seas are not uncommon, and the ships are of a type to suit these conditions.

II

Officers and men on the active list (seagoing) of the Royal Australian Navy in September 1939 were 430 and 5,010 respectively. Most of these were Australians, products of the Royal Australian Naval College and Flinders Naval Depot. Of the boys who had entered the Naval College just before and during the 1914-18 war, a number were now senior officers,

³ HMAS *Perth*, cruiser (1936), 6,980 tons, eight 6-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 32.5 kts; sunk in Battle of Java Sea, 1 Mar 1942.

⁴ Cairns to Brisbane 837 nautical miles.
Brisbane to Sydney 523 nautical miles.
Sydney to Melbourne 580 nautical miles.
Sydney to Hobart 633 nautical miles.
Melbourne to Adelaide 515 nautical miles.
Adelaide to Fremantle 1,378 nautical miles.
Cairns to Fremantle 3,067 nautical miles (north about).
Fremantle to Darwin 1,848 nautical miles (west about).

including three captains,⁵ and, with engineer officers among them, thirty-one who had reached the rank of commander. Their training, and that of the later entrants who were following them in the Service, had been practically identical with that of the officers of the Royal Navy. During the between-war years the Captain of the R.A.N. College had in every case up to 1936 been an officer of the Royal Navy; and subsequent to graduation from the college, much of each Australian officer's training had been in Royal Naval ships and shore establishments. The difference between the two navies as regards officers lay in the conditions of entry into their respective naval colleges. Whereas social qualifications and financial standing were factors largely limiting entry into the Royal Naval College, the Commonwealth Government had from the outset laid down that no boy with the necessary ability should be debarred from entering the R.A.N. College through lack of either social or financial standing by his parents. The college charged no fees, and from the moment of entry a boy became a member of the Permanent Naval Forces of the Commonwealth, which bore the whole cost of his training and maintenance, even to the provision of weekly pocket money. The boys were only 13 years of age when they entered the college, and the imprint of surroundings and training quickly became apparent and lasting; but although thus moulded to a pattern, much of the individuality originally implanted in boys drawn from varied strata of the social structure remained, so that a greater variety of personality was found among Australian naval officers than might have been the case had entry been more restricted to any one class. In other ways the system showed good results. In competition with officers of the Royal Navy and other Dominion navies in examinations for sub-lieutenant and lieutenant, and in technical courses in the Royal Navy's schools, graduates of the R.A.N. College had in general shown up well, and at times had been outstanding.

Largely because of the fact that in peacetime, and more particularly in the higher ranks, the appointments available for officers in a relatively small navy are limited, the road of promotion was not an easy one for the Australian naval officer. In addition, more than one reduction in Australian naval strength in the between-war years had imposed severe pruning of promising material, both among cadets still at the college, and qualified officers advancing in the Service. For many there was present the spectre of retirement at a comparatively early age, with no pension, and deferred pay as the only compensation with which to enter a new world offering but limited openings. There was thus keen competition for selective promotion to commander and above, the selection for this promotion being correspondingly exacting. The way was often hard upon the individual. But the result was the production of naval officers of a high standard of leadership and professional ability, imbued with the spirit engendered by training in the traditions of the Royal Navy, but retaining to an appreciable degree an original and individual Australian outlook. The position was

⁵ H. B. Farncomb was the first graduate of the Naval College to reach the rank of captain, RAN, in June 1937; followed by J. A. Collins in December of that year, and J. Burnett twelve months later.

being reached when, as the Minister for Defence had stated thirteen years earlier: "every position, senior and junior, should be held by Australians, who by training will also be fitted to carry out exchange work with the Royal Navy."⁶

On the lower deck, a parallel situation existed. The system of entry of boys into the training ship *Tingira* had been abandoned in 1927, and Flinders Naval Depot, established in 1920, had become the training establishment for all new entries—the lower age limit being increased to seventeen years—as well as that for men undergoing advanced training; and, from junior to senior ratings, those on the active list were mainly Australians, Australian-trained, and with a growing Australian naval tradition behind them. Educational qualifications for entry were kept high, only 10 per cent of applicants being accepted, so that a good class of recruit was entered, a fact increasingly apparent when recruiting was resumed in the expansion period following the economic depression. Engagement was for an initial period of twelve years, which in suitable cases could be extended up to twenty-two years by re-engagement. A sound training was given at Flinders Naval Depot, where schools in all branches had been established, and many of the ratings, especially among the petty officers, had exchange experience in ships and establishments of the Royal Navy, while, as members of the companies of Australian ships which had served on cruiser exchange duty, many others also had overseas service.

The lower deck had shared the vicissitudes and uncertainties of the various reduction periods, especially during the depression, when nearly 600 were retired from the Service out of a total strength of a little over 3,000. Cuts in pay and allowances were suffered by those who remained, but despite the atmosphere of disappointment and doubt induced by reductions in strength and emoluments, the spirit of the lower deck remained balanced and firm, as was shown in November 1932, when an attempt was made by outside subversive forces to raise in the ships of the squadron an echo of the Invergordon mutiny of the previous year. While the squadron was in Melbourne during the spring cruise, there fell the fifteenth anniversary of the Communist revolution in Russia, and local Communist interests endeavoured to organise a demonstration in the city, and at the same time to play upon the feelings of the men in the squadron, among whom grounds for grievance existed regarding the rates of various of their financial allowances, which were lower than those ruling in the Public Service. In an attempt to exploit these grievances, copies of a roneoed document were distributed among the ratings, inciting them to mutiny and to refuse to sail. But the men resisted the pressure, and the ships sailed to schedule, the grievances subsequently being removed by adjustment of the allowances. With the expansion program of the

⁶ Sir Neville Howse, then Minister for Defence, told the House of Representatives in August 1926, that this position should be reached "within twenty years". Two graduates of the Naval College, H. B. Farncomb and J. A. Collins, were promoted Rear-Admiral in January 1947. Rear-Admiral Farncomb was then Flag Officer Commanding the Royal Australian Naval Squadron; and with the appointment in January 1948 of Rear-Admiral Collins as First Naval Member and Chief of the Naval Staff, the two highest appointments in the Royal Australian Navy were held by graduates of the RAN College.

immediate pre-war years, and the resumption of recruiting, the outlook for careers in the Service became brighter, and the advent of the year 1939 found the lower deck keen and efficient although, in spite of the influx of new blood on the active list as a result of the recruiting programs, insufficient in numbers to bring the navy up to a war footing without calling upon the Reserves.⁷

The Reserve Forces, source of immediate augmentation of the permanent naval forces in time of emergency, totalled 531 officers and 3,869 ratings at the outbreak of war in 1939. The greatest number of these, 222 officers and all the ratings, were members of the Royal Australian Naval Reserve which, established in 1911, when it combined in two sections the then existing voluntary Naval Militia and the naval trainees selected under the Compulsory Training Scheme inaugurated in that year, had, since the abandonment of compulsory training in 1929, reverted to engagement on a voluntary basis. Under the voluntary system the number of ratings in this branch of the Reserves had fallen by a little more than half, the greatest loss being in the twelve months immediately following the abandonment of compulsory training, though there was a steady decrease in membership during the succeeding years.

The loss of membership immediately compulsory training was abolished was to be expected. The subsequent steady drain was due to various factors, chief among which was probably the lack of training afloat resulting from financial stringency and the disposal of the training sloops in 1932. As one District Naval Officer put it in later years:

The absence of training afloat during the voluntary period was, in my opinion, the chief reason for the decline in volunteers. Who could enthuse over heaving a small sand bag on the end of a heaving line, from a platform built up in a drill hall, on to a cement floor; dropping anchors from a model; and pretending to fire guns? Give the lads the real thing to exercise at, and you will hold their interest. We did our best, but I certainly blame the lack of seagoing training as the primary reason for the falling off in volunteers.

There was also a certain amount of intimidation when the voluntary scheme was first instituted. Volunteers on their way to drill were assaulted by small gangs of larrikins who, having themselves got out as soon as compulsory training was abolished, resented seeing others continue in the Reserve. This certainly was the case at Port Melbourne, where volunteers had to go to drill in groups for self-protection; a state of affairs which no doubt influenced some parents. In contrast to the decline in the number of ratings in the R.A.N.R., that of the officers remained fairly constant. And in spite of the over-all reduction there was a gain inasmuch as those who remained in the R.A.N.R. under the voluntary scheme were possessed

⁷ Lord Mountevans, writing of the Australian naval seaman when discussing, in his book *Adventurous Life*, his experiences as Rear-Admiral Commanding the Squadron, 1929-32, describes him as one who "must always be doing something. He seems to like work as long as it is sensibly organised." And he adds: "I had my dark days in Australia when I said 'Good-bye' to the cream of Australia's officers and men who left under the Reduction Scheme, keen, expert and highly trained youngsters and oldsters to face life anew and seek a new career." A great help at this time—as at others—to the Service and to its individuals, was the Ex-Naval Men's Association of Australia, of which Lord Mountevans says: "In each of the principal cities the ex-naval men have their organisation, and they not only helped the seaman and stoker who had been struck down by the storm of disarmament and reduction but they also looked after ex-naval petty officers and, to their lasting credit, they helped many an ex-officer back to a permanent job."

of the interest and keenness suggested by that fact, although their efficiency was naturally limited by the lack of facilities for practical training.⁸

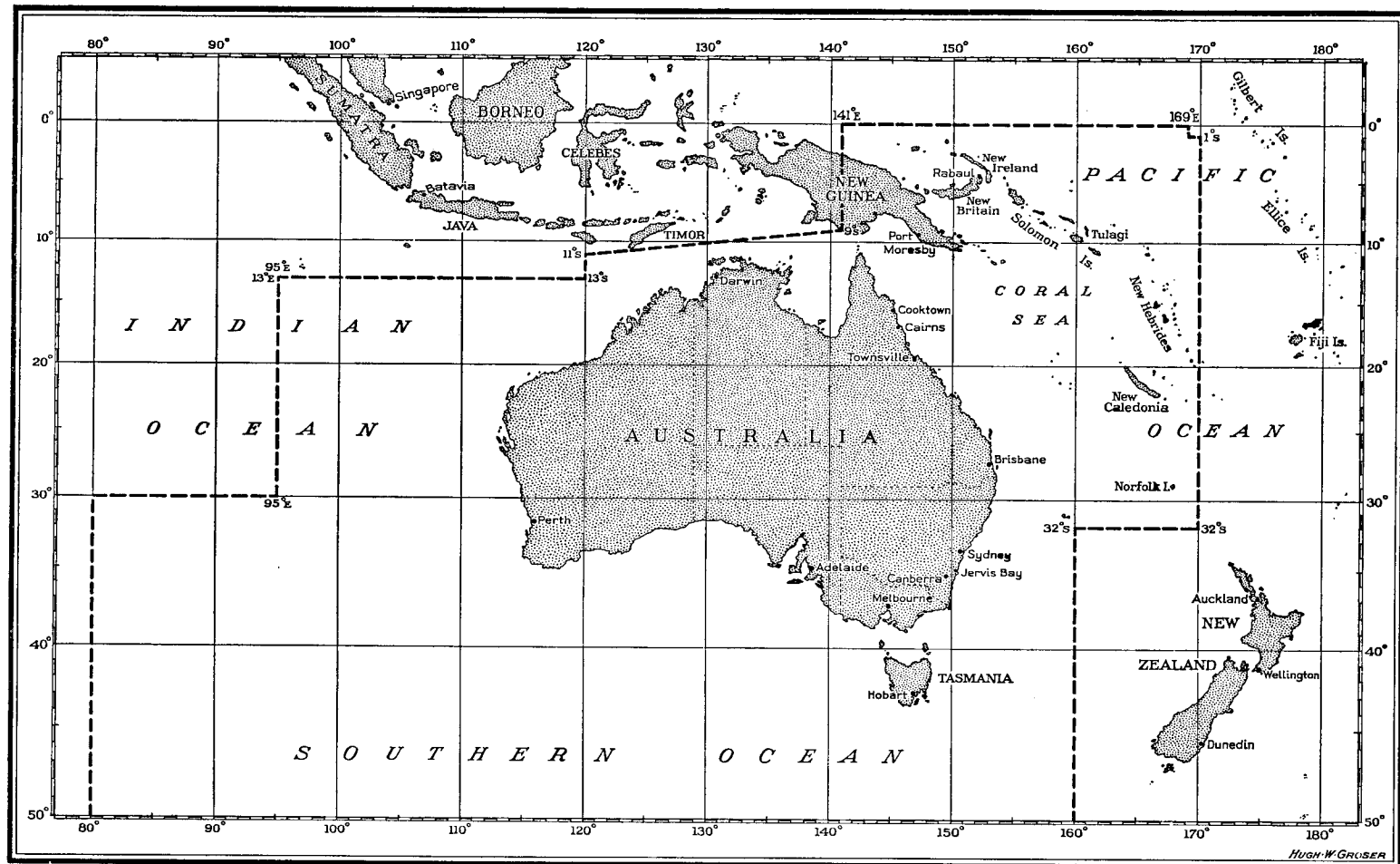
The remainder of the Reserve Forces consisted of eighty-six officers of the R.A.N.R. (Seagoing), they being serving cadets and officers in the Merchant Service who underwent a period of naval training annually; and 223 officers of the Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve, this branch being composed of persons who had followed the sea as a profession, followed the sea in recreation and desired sea service in time of war, were ex-members of the R.A.N.R. who had completed their compulsory training in that branch, or possessed some special qualifications. There were in addition, for service in time of war, 459 ex-permanent service officers, both R.N. and R.A.N., on the Retired and Emergency Lists, including many of those who had been retrenched from the navy during the reduction periods and had found other employment ashore; and 430 ratings of the Royal Fleet Reserve and the Royal Australian Fleet Reserve, made up of men who had served their time in the permanent force and were liable to be called up in the event of war or national emergency.

It was thus possible, by the mobilisation of officers and ratings who, though of varying experience and training, had each considerable enthusiasm and at least some knowledge of what would be expected of him, to almost double the manning strength of the navy at very short notice, bringing it to a total of over 10,000 officers and men for immediate service in ships and establishments either on the Australia Station or overseas.

III

The Australia Station, the defence of which was the immediate concern of the navy, embraced the mainland of Australia and islands to the north and east of the continent, with the surrounding seas. It extended in the west from the coast some 1,500 miles into the Indian Ocean; on the north and east to embrace the mandated territories, and the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands. Reaching from the equator to the antarctic in its greatest north-south axis, and covering one-quarter of the Southern Hemisphere in its extreme east-west dimension, it was an area of considerable steaming distances. Circumnavigation of the Australian mainland and Tasmania alone, by the most direct point-to-point routes, involved a voyage of nearly 7,000 miles; approximating to that across the Pacific from Sydney to the United States of America or, in the other direction, from Sydney to South Africa across the Indian Ocean. Australia's area of closest settlement was in the south-east and east of the continent, where major ports were most closely spaced, but even there, more than 500 miles in each case separated Adelaide from Melbourne, Melbourne from Sydney, and Sydney from Brisbane. In the west, Fremantle was 1,378 miles

⁸ Annual periods of training, obligatory for all officers and ratings, consisted of the equivalent of eight days drill at the port depot, three-quarters of which could be night drills, and thirteen days continuous training in one of HMA Ships or Establishments or, alternatively, the equivalent of fourteen days drill and seven days continuous training under similar conditions. The training syllabus included physical and company drill, rifle and field exercises, boat work, seamanship, visual signalling, musketry and gun drill.



HUGH W. GRUBER

Limits of the Australia Station, 1939

from Adelaide by sea, while the northern port of Darwin was distant 1,848 miles from Fremantle on the one hand, and 2,048 miles from its nearest major eastern port of Brisbane on the other. The focal area at the south-eastern extremity of the continent was not only that where converged the normal peacetime trade routes, but was the bottleneck through which passed the traffic essential to Australia's war economy, the iron ore trade between South Australia and New South Wales, the Tasmanian limestone trade, and the Newcastle coal and steel traffic to Victoria, South Australia, and the West. The other main focal area was that at the south-west corner of Australia, and the ocean routes converging on Fremantle.

Over-all responsibility for the Station was borne by the Naval Board at Navy Office, Melbourne, whence stemmed the administration of the navy through the various directorates of the Naval Staff, and the civilian branches such as the Naval Stores Branch and Victualling Branch, Navy Accounts, and the Secretariat. The main body of administration was a civilian staff organised to maintain continuity and method, thus permitting the Naval Staff, which consisted of naval officers appointed to Navy Office usually for two-year periods, to be changed without disruption. Administration was in two broad divisions, central administration by the Board and the Directorates, and that of Ships and Establishments which, while under the supervision of the Board, was otherwise independent.

At the outbreak of war in 1939 the Naval Board consisted of the Minister for Defence—there being at that time no separate Navy portfolio—Brigadier Street,⁹ as President; Admiral Colvin, First Naval Member and Chief of the Naval Staff; Commodore Boucher, R.N.,¹ Second Naval Member; and Mr Nankervis,² Finance and Civil Member. Mr Macandie³ was secretary to the Board.

The two main establishments, Flinders Naval Depot in Victoria and Sydney Naval Base in New South Wales, were under the command of a Captain Superintendent of Training and a Captain-in-Charge respectively. Other smaller establishments existed in the headquarters of the seven Naval Districts into which the Commonwealth was divided, one for each State and the Northern Territory, each being under the direction of a District Naval Officer, established with a small staff in his capital city port.

Of the rank of lieutenant-commander or commander, the District Naval Officer, by reason of the great distances in most instances separating him from the nearest senior naval authority, occupied a position of some moment in the Australian naval organisation. He, or appropriate members

⁹ Brig Hon G. A. Street, MC. (1st AIF: 1 Bn, 1914-17; BM 15 Bde, 1917-18.) MHR 1934-40; Min for Def 1938-40, for Army 1940. Grazier; of Lismore, Vic; b. Sydney, 21 Jan 1894. Killed in aircraft accident 13 Aug 1940.

¹ Rear-Adm M. W. S. Boucher, DSO; RN. Ent RN 1904. HMS *Lowestoft* 1915-18; Second Naval Member, Aust Naval Board, 1939-40; pilot Air Transport Aux and Cmdre in command of convoys 1941-45. B. London, 19 Dec 1888.

² A. R. Nankervis, OBE. Joined S.A. Public Service, trans to Fed Public Service at Federation in Posts and Telegraphs. Joined Navy Dept 1911 as naval staff clerk. Dir Nav Accts and Fin Memb ACNB 1938-39; Sec, Dept of Navy 1939-49. B. Kadina, SA, 10 Mar 1885.

³ G. L. Macandie, CBE. Ent Old Public Service as clerk, Marine Defence Force, 1896. Was Sec to Vice-Adm Sir W. Creswell 1900 until Creswell's retirement 1919. Naval Sec 1914, and Sec Naval Board 1914-46. B. Brisbane, 26 Jun 1877.

of his staff, represented the Navy Office directorates, thus providing the link with the Naval Staff. He was the Navy in the social and official life of his neighbourhood. His duties embraced responsibility, as far as naval interests were concerned, for the coastline of his District, including providing for the efficiency of the signal station service for naval purposes, and examination services at defended ports in case of war; the giving of such assistance as was required by visiting naval vessels; cooperation with other Services; Intelligence, with which was associated the coastwatching organisation; local recruiting for the permanent naval forces; and entering, organising, and training the Naval Reserves allotted to his District.

Ever since that twenty-first day of January 1788, when Captain Arthur Phillip, R.N., sailed through the Heads at Port Jackson and "had the satisfaction of finding the finest harbour in the world, in which a thousand sail of the line may ride in the most perfect security", Sydney has been Australia's premier naval base. Before the establishment of the Australia Station as a separate command in 1859, the port had become the recognised headquarters and depot for ships of the Royal Navy in Australian waters, and throughout the succeeding years the waters of Farm Cove, where the ships swung to their buoys, had mirrored the pageant of naval development of the Sydney-based squadrons, from the masts and yards of sailing frigates to the grey hulls and funnels of their 1939 descendants.

Distributed around the Harbour, the facilities of a naval base had developed, though limited in 1939 so far as graving docks were concerned to an ability to meet nothing greater than the requirements of the largest ships of the existing squadron. There were the engineering shops and the stores, the refitting and repair berths, of Garden Island; the Royal Edward Victualling Yard at Pyrmont; the armament depot at Spectacle Island; the dockyard at Cockatoo Island, where the graving dock had been extended to accommodate the large cruisers as part of the 1924-28 development program; the oil fuel tanks which had been erected and filled as part of that and succeeding naval programs, and other adjuncts of a naval base.

The Sydney citizen knew the navy to an extent denied to his brother of the other State capitals, though all are coastal cities. The greater part of the squadron's time in port was spent in Sydney Harbour, and visits to the sister capitals were few, exercises and "showing the flag" cruises taking the squadron elsewhere. There would usually be one or more ships lying at the buoys in Farm Cove; and the Sydneysider, strolling in the Domain or watching from the decks of passing ferries, would see the bustle of boat traffic between them and Garden Island and Man-o'-War Steps, and would hear the clear note of the bugle, the thin wail of the pipe, and the mellowed clang of time-marking bells drifting across the water; sights and sounds which, in this small area close to the city's heart, had persisted over the years since the first British ship had dropped anchor in the then silent harbour. So that Sydney, alone of the Australian seaboard cities, had developed something of the permanent character of a naval port, where naval occasions entered into the city's life, and sailors' uniforms about her waterfront and streets were an accepted part of the scene.

Only in Sydney was there in 1939 a graving dock large enough to take the heaviest units of the squadron, although nearby Newcastle had the floating dock constructed to lift the large cruisers. Graving docks capable of accommodating destroyers and smaller vessels existed at Melbourne and Brisbane; and fuelling facilities were available at these and other major ports, including Darwin, where naval fuel installations had been established as part of the defence developments.

The squadron, consisting of the main fighting units, was under the command of a rear-admiral, and the tactical disposition of the ships, and their internal administration through each ship's commanding officer, was solely his responsibility under the policy laid down by the Naval Board. Small units detailed for special duties and not forming part of the squadron, operated under the control of the local naval authority at the port to which they were attached, or in some instances were operated direct by the Naval Board.

At this stage somewhat tenacious of its reputation as the "Silent Service", little was known by the public generally of the navy or its personalities. Apart from the destruction of the German cruiser *Emden* by the *Sydney* in November 1914, the navy's activities in the first world war had been unspectacular, if arduous. No popular figures comparable with those of the leading military commanders had emerged and retained recognition. The senior officers, on loan from the Royal Navy for brief appointments, were changing frequently, and Australians rising in rank were not as yet in the public eye. Such naval publicity as stirred interest to any degree was in the nature of abstract discussion as to the merits or demerits of navies at large and types of ships in particular, and beyond immediate naval circles few Australians could have named any officer in their navy, however exalted his rank or position. Yet the succession of officers who had occupied positions on the Naval Board, and commanded ships and establishments of the Royal Australian Navy in the between-war years, had done a good service for the navy, and contributed in no little degree to the efficiency of the country's naval defences.

Such a one was Admiral Colvin, who in 1939 occupied the position of First Naval Member and Chief of the Naval Staff, to which appointment he had come in 1937 from that of President of the Royal Naval College at Greenwich. He brought to Australia's pressing naval problems of the immediate pre-war years an alert mind fortified by sound professional knowledge acquired through a wide variety of experience in senior appointments afloat and ashore in the Royal Navy. An outstanding administrator, of reliable judgment and quick decision, he had the ability to strip unessentials and get down at once to the basis of a problem. In his late fifties, his rapid physical actions matched his mental alertness. Tall, and of commanding appearance, albeit essentially human and approachable and with a ready wit, he upheld the navy's status in the affairs of the nation, and was the ideal man for the position he occupied and the time at which he filled it, his energy and sure touch inspiring confidence both inside and outside the Service.

At the time of the outbreak of war, Admiral Colvin was in England—he resumed his responsibilities on his return to Australia early in October 1939—and Commodore Boucher, Second Naval Member, was Acting Chief of Staff. Then fifty years of age, and a captain on loan from the Royal Navy, Boucher had specialised in naval aviation, and had considerable administrative experience in the Naval Air Division, Admiralty, besides having commanded an aircraft carrier. He maintained his interest in active flying, and while on the Naval Board he regularly flew an aircraft, to keep his hand in, at the R.A.A.F. station at Laverton.

The four Operations and Intelligence officers on the staff,⁴ headed by Captain Collins, the decisive, quick-thinking Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff, were Australians, and graduates of the R.A.N. College.

On the civil side, Mr Nankervis, as Civil and Finance Member of the Board and Permanent Head of the Department, had nearly thirty years' experience with the navy, with navy finance, and with departmental procedure. He was the right hand of the Minister, and the main link between the Board and the political administration.⁵

In its Secretary, Macandie, the Board had the invaluable experience and guidance of one who, more than any other, had grown up in the navy and, as Naval Secretary for many years, including those of the 1914-18 war, had an almost Pepsysian association with, and knowledge of, Navy Office and the civil and uniformed staff of the whole Service. He and his untiring, encyclopaedic colleague, T. J. Hawkins,⁶ head of "N", the Naval Staff Secretariat, were the two civil officers on whom, more than any other, the Naval Staff relied for pilotage through the tortuous channels of departmental procedure. Tortuous those channels were, for the naval administrative machine was large and apparently complicated, its operations many and varied, and far-reaching in their effects. In some of its aspects it appeared slow-moving and cumbrous; but it worked efficiently and well and, when occasion demanded, with unexpected speed.

⁴ Vice-Adm Sir John Collins, KBE, CB; RAN. HMS *Canada* 1917-18. Asst Ch of Naval Staff 1938-39. Comd HMAS *Sydney* 1939-41. Brit naval forces in ABDA Area 1942. HMAS *Shropshire* 1943-44. Aust Sqn 1944 and 1945-46; First Naval Memb and CNS 1948-55. Aust High Commr to NZ since 1956. B. Deloraine, Tas, 7 Jan 1899.

Rear-Adm H. M. Burrell, CBE; RAN. Staff Offr (Ops), Navy Office, 1939-40; Comd HMAS *Norman* 1941-43; Dir of Plans 1943-45; Capt (D) 10 Destr Flotilla 1945; Dep CNS 1946-48. B. Wentworth Falls, NSW, 13 Aug 1904.

Capt G. C. Oldham, DSC; RAN. Naval Staff, Navy Office, 1938-40; Staff Offr (Ops and Intell) to RAC Aust Sqn 1940-41; Comd HMAS *Swan* 1942-43; HMAS *Shropshire* 1944-45; Joint Sec Aust Chiefs of Staff Cttee 1945-46; DNI 1948-50. B. Glenelg, SA, 4 Sep 1906.

Cdr R. B. M. Long, OBE; RAN. HMAS *Australia* 1917-18. ADNI 1936-39; DNI 1939-45. B. Princes Hill, Melbourne, 19 Sep 1899.

⁵ The portfolio of Navy Minister was restored in Nov 1939, Sir Frederick Stewart being appointed to the office. Brig Street remained as Acting Minister for the Navy. In Jul 1940 the office of Third Naval Member, which had lapsed in 1922, was restored, Eng Rear-Adm P. E. McNeil being appointed. In Oct 1940 the Board was enlarged by the addition of Mr R. Anthony as Finance and Civil Member, Mr Nankervis retaining his seat on the Board as Sec of the Dept. The following year membership of the Board was further enlarged with the addition of a Business Member.

Hon Sir Frederick Stewart. MHR 1931-46. Min for the Navy Nov 1939-Mar 1940. B. Newcastle, NSW, 14 Aug 1884.

Eng Rear-Adm P. E. McNeil, CB. Ent RAN 1911; Eng Rear-Adm 1934; Third Naval Memb 1940-43. Dir, Shipbuilding Board, 1943-48. B. Melbourne, 25 Sep 1883. Died 17 Apr 1951.

R. Anthony. Ent Navy Dept 1911; Finance Member 1940-49. B. Hobart, Tas, 19 Aug 1884. Died 2 Jun 1949.

⁶ T. J. Hawkins, CBE, Ent Navy Dept as Naval Staff Clerk 1915. Head of "N" 1938 and throughout the war of 1939-45; Asst Sec Dept of Navy 1944-46; Sec Naval Board 1946-49; Sec Dept of Navy since 1949. B. Carlton, Vic, 15 Nov 1898.

It was only natural that, within the navy itself, it should be the subject of considerable criticism, especially among those who were bearing the strain and stress of war afloat or in distant front-line shore establishments, and who were often roused to profane wonder that those in the "Yogi House" in Melbourne could not be put to more profitable war-winning activities. That there was room for criticism cannot be gainsaid. But much of it arose from misapprehension, and many of those whose appointments brought them from the clear spaces to Navy Office for a period, and who came to scoff, remained, if not to pray, at any rate to appreciate the work done there. That the foundations of the machine were sound was shown by the way it stood up to the test of rapid and great expansion—with inexperienced newcomers—under the impact of a war which posed many original problems. Into its workings the human element entered largely; and it was due to the capable team work which had been evolved, and the cooperation between uniformed and civil staffs that, in general, obtained, that the success of those workings was due.

In command of the squadron in 1939 was Rear-Admiral Custance,⁷ on loan from the Royal Navy, who had been appointed in April 1938, and was flying his flag in *Canberra*. He was not, however, to command the squadron in war. On the eve of hostilities he was in the grip of a disease shortly to prove fatal. He hauled his flag down on 2nd September 1939, on which day his Flag Captain, W. R. Patterson,⁸ assumed command of the squadron in *Canberra* as commodore second class.

IV

Throughout the twelve months preceding September 1939, the successive and deepening shadows of overseas events presaging war produced their effects in the Australian naval scene. That of the Munich Crisis in September 1938 brought about a partial mobilisation of the Australian naval forces. With the exception of the sloops *Yarra* and *Swan*, which were in Western Australian waters, the effective ships of the squadron were concentrated in Sydney to complete full war stowage. *Yarra* and *Swan* proceeded to Fremantle, and were brought up to full complement of ratings, sent overland by rail from Flinders Naval Depot. The destroyers *Stuart*, *Vendetta* and *Waterhen* were commissioned from reserve, and work speeded up on *Adelaide*, which was being refitted and converted to oil fuel. A small number of Naval Reserve volunteers were mobilised to act as guards at vulnerable naval points. With the end of the crisis, the opportunity was taken to give the ships a short period of training before those brought from reserve reverted to that state. The cruiser *Australia*, which was in dockyard hands undergoing major modernisation, did not take

⁷ Rear-Adm W. N. Custance, CB. Ent RN 1899; Spec Gunnery Capt 1925; CO Gunnery Sch, Devonport, 1932-34; HMS *Rodney* 1934-36; Comd Aust Sqn Apr 1938-Sep 1939. B. 25 Jun 1884. Died 13 Dec 1939.

⁸ Admiral Sir Wilfrid Patterson, KCB, CVO, CBE. Ent RN 1906. CO *Canberra* Apr 1938-Jun 1940; Cmdre Cdg Aust Sqn 2 Sep-31 Oct 1939; comd 5 Crsr Sqn 1945. Of Belfast; b. Belfast, 20 Nov 1893. Died 15 Dec 1954.

part in these activities,⁹ nor did she participate in a short combined trade defence exercise, which was carried out in the focal area of south-east Australia from 17th to 19th April 1939, and in which New Zealand was represented by the cruiser *Leander*,¹ while the Royal Australian Air Force also took part in reconnaissance. Ships concerned in this exercise were *Canberra*, *Sydney*, *Hobart*,² *Adelaide*—which had commissioned on 13th March—*Vendetta*, *Vampire*, *Voyager*, *Swan* and *Yarra*. But for a number of them the occasion was again a brief emergence from reserve, into which they returned with the conclusion of the exercise. Manning was a factor contributing to this, a full cruiser complement of permanent service officers and ratings proceeding to the United Kingdom the following month to commission H.M.A.S. *Perth*.³

The signs and portents multiplied with increasing and ominous clarity. In 1914 war had burst upon the nations with dramatic suddenness, the first hint of its approach coming "out of a clear sky" to the Australia Station, where "everything was normal; a more placid situation could scarcely be conceived",⁴ only nine days before the outbreak of hostilities. This time it was different. There had been years of crisis after crisis, survived at varying but growing cost by those not yet caught up in actual conflict, though provocative among them of rising apprehension but partially countered by clinging hopes. But now the march of events quickened along a path whose signposts were clearly marked.

On 14th March 1939 Germany had incorporated Czechoslovakia in the Reich by the proclamation of a German Protectorate. On the 31st of the month the British Prime Minister, Mr Chamberlain, informed the House of Commons that Britain and France had guaranteed "all support in their power" to Poland—now the object of German attentions—in the event of any action which threatened that country's independence. On 5th April, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty told the House of Commons that it was anticipated that 1,000 British merchant ships would be stiffened for guns by the end of the year. On the 7th Italian forces landed in Albania, and quickly subjugated that country. In the United States the European situation—and its possible repercussions in Japan—brought reactions, and on 16th April President Roosevelt ordered the fleet, which had been on manoeuvres in the Caribbean and was intended to visit New York for the World Fair, to return immediately to the Pacific, commercial traffic in the Panama Canal being halted to expedite its transit.

⁹ The crisis emphasised the leeway to be made up in the reconstruction of the older cruisers. Discussing this, the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 27 Oct 1938 commented that "the Navy found itself with two of its four cruisers undergoing refits; its one remaining heavy cruiser still lacking protective armour without which ships of its class are considered to be unfit for war". *Hobart*, at the Munich period, was in the United Kingdom, and did not reach Australia until Dec 1938. *Perth* was not commissioned in the RAN until June 1939, and did not arrive in Australia until April 1940. The modernisation of *Australia* was completed just as hostilities began. Events did not wait for that of *Canberra* to be undertaken.

¹ HMS *Leander*, cruiser (1933), 7,270 tons, eight 6-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes; 32.5 kts; with sister ship *Achilles* lent to NZ.

² HMAS *Hobart*, cruiser (1936), 7,105 tons, eight 6-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 32.5 kts.

³ The ship's company of *Perth* sailed from Sydney on 15 May 1939, in the Blue Funnel steamer *Autolycus*.

⁴ A. W. Jose, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18*, Vol IX (1928), p. 2.

On 27th April the British Government introduced conscription, and the following day Hitler announced to the Reichstag his abrogation of the Anglo-German Naval Treaty. On the 22nd May a pact of mutual assistance between Germany and Italy, the "Pact of Steel", was signed at Berlin. Earlier in that month the Australian Government expressed its full accord with the action of the British Government in its guarantee to Poland. In a speech in the House of Representatives, the Minister for External Affairs said there was complete unanimity between the two Governments on the policy being followed, and that the Commonwealth Government was "fully satisfied that recent actions and prevailing dispositions and certain preliminary moves of the totalitarian nations of Europe constitute a near and grave menace not only to the United Kingdom but also to Australia and to the democracies of the world as a whole. . . . If therefore, in pursuance of this policy, the Government of Great Britain is at any moment plunged into war, this Government will, on behalf of the Australian people, make common cause with the Mother Country in that War."⁵ Straws in the rising wind thickened, whirling towards the time when this promise was to be redeemed.

Towards the end of June, the Admiralty announced the decision to advance the normal summer leave period for ships of the Home Fleet, to enable dockings and refits to be completed in July, preparatory to carrying out exercises in August. Early in July the British Prime Minister told the House of Commons that 12,000 officers and men of the Royal Naval Reserves would be called up for training at the end of that month, ships of the Reserve Fleet being commissioned for exercises with the Home Fleet. Later in July the Admiralty's purchase of eighty-six modern trawlers for use as minesweepers was announced, the vessels to be delivered to the navy as they returned from the fishing grounds; and on 31st July came the news that all vessels of the Royal Navy Reserve Fleet would remain on an emergency footing during August and September. Fruitless discussions punctuated a rapidly deteriorating situation throughout August, as Germany increased political and propaganda pressure on Poland, and on the 23rd of the month the position worsened when Germany signed a pact of non-aggression with Soviet Russia, thus shattering hopes of a European peace front against the Nazis.

The day before this, the Naval Board had received news which caused them to redispense the active ships of the Australian Squadron, then dispersed around the Australian coast in the early stages of the annual spring cruise, which was intended to include a visit to the Netherlands East Indies. *Canberra* was on passage from Port Moresby to Darwin, *Sydney* was in Darwin, *Hobart* in Brisbane, and *Voyager* on passage from Cairns to Townsville, while the destroyers *Vendetta* and *Vampire* were carrying out short training cruises from Sydney and Melbourne respectively. Shortly before midnight on 22nd August, Navy Office received a signal from the

⁵ Debate on the Annual Report of the Department of External Affairs for the year 1938. House of Representatives, 9 May 1939. *Commonwealth Debates*, Vol 159, p. 198.

Admiralty indicating that armament was to be mounted in certain classes of Royal Fleet Auxiliary Tankers. Reading into this a suggestion that the danger of war was acute, the Naval Board decided to cancel the squadron cruise, and to order the ships to their war stations. This was done, *Sydney* proceeding immediately from Darwin to Fremantle, and the other ships returning forthwith to Sydney.

From then on events moved swiftly to the climax. On 23rd August Admiralty advice was received that naval control of all British merchant shipping had been assumed, and that movements of the vessels of Germany, Italy, and Japan, were to be reported, and the Naval Board instructed district naval officers to act accordingly. The following day the Admiralty requested the Commonwealth Government's permission to retain *Perth* on the West Indies Station for the time being, she then being in the Caribbean on her way to Australia via the Panama Canal, after having represented Australia at the New York World Fair. Cruisers, the Admiralty pointed out, were urgently needed in the Atlantic, "and intervention by Japan seems a lesser probability". Compliance with this request was recommended by the Naval Board, and the Government agreed, with the proviso that its decision be reconsidered in the event of a Far Eastern war. On 25th August the Naval Board instructed district naval officers to place guards unobtrusively at all vulnerable points, using volunteers from among the Reserves; and on that day the first Australian naval staff established away from the mainland was set up, with the appointment of Lieut-Commander Hunt⁶—who had been in charge of the New Guinea Survey Party—as Naval Officer-in-Charge, Port Moresby, with members of the survey party as his original base staff. Some 350 reserve volunteers, officers and ratings, were mobilised on 27th August, for duty at Darwin, at Navy Office, with the Naval Control Service, and as guards.

Meanwhile four German merchant ships—*Cassel*, *Erlangen*, *Lahn* and *Stassfurt*⁷—had been reported in Australian waters, all being in Australian ports or on coastal passage with the exception of *Erlangen*, which was on passage from Lyttelton, New Zealand, to Sydney. On 26th August *Lahn* unexpectedly sailed from Sydney at 1.38 a.m., steering eastward, and was later sighted by reconnaissance aircraft from the R.A.A.F. station at Richmond, New South Wales, approximately 100 miles east of the port. At 9.10 a.m. the destroyer *Vendetta* (Lieut-Commander Cant⁸) was ordered to shadow her, but was recalled during the afternoon. The same day the *Stassfurt*, which was due at Melbourne from Adelaide, failed to arrive at the Victorian port, and search by aircraft from the R.A.A.F. station at Laverton, Victoria, and by the destroyer *Vampire* (Lieut-Commander Walsh⁹) failed to discover her. Nothing was seen of the other two German

⁶ Cdr R. B. A. Hunt, OBE; RAN. Specialised as hydrographic surveyor; principal commands in war: HMA ships *Moresby*, *Bungaree*, *Warrego*, *Gascoyne*, NOIC Port Moresby; commanded Advanced Survey Unit with U.S. Seventh Fleet. Of Armadale, Vic; b. Sydney, 17 Jun 1901.

⁷ *Cassel* 6,047 tons, *Erlangen* 6,101, *Lahn* 8,498, *Stassfurt* 7,395.

⁸ Cdr G. L. Cant, RAN. During war commanded HMA Ships *Vendetta*, *Kybra*, *Maryborough*, *Platypus*, *Bungaree*, and *Adelaide*. Of Blackwood, SA; b. Glenelg, SA, 7 Jun 1902.

⁹ Capt J. A. Walsh, OBE; RAN. During war commanded HMAS *Vampire*, was Exec Officer *Canberra* when that ship lost at Guadalcanal; was later at Navy Office, Cdr (D) in HMAS *Platypus*, and NOIC Moluccas. Of Toowoomba, Qld; b. Toowoomba, 8 Oct 1905.

vessels. All four were evidently acting on orders from Germany, for while the searches for *Lahn* and *Stassfurt* were in progress, advice was received from the Admiralty that all German merchant ships had been diverted from normal routes.¹

The Admiralty had received authority to requisition British shipping on 25th August, and on 27th August requisitioned three passenger liners then in Sydney, *Moreton Bay*, *Arawa*, and *Change*,² the first-named two for conversion to armed merchant cruisers, and the *Change* for duty as a victualling stores issuing ship, while the Naval Board requisitioned the coastal liner *Kanimbla* on behalf of the Admiralty for conversion to an A.M.C. The same day the naval control of merchant shipping on the Australia Station was established.

The imminence of war, at this stage, appeared to be with Germany only. Italy had made no sign, and was apparently waiting on events.³ As a precautionary measure, however, the Admiralty announced on 28th August that the Mediterranean was temporarily closed to British merchant shipping; no ships were to visit Italian ports, and those already in Italian ports were to leave. The following day, 29th August, a telegram was received from the United Kingdom Government requesting, in view of the critical situation vis-à-vis Germany, that ships of the Royal Australian Navy be held in immediate readiness, "and where applicable may move towards their war stations" in accordance with dispositions already agreed upon. These measures, it was pointed out, would be similar to those already taken in relation to ships of the Royal Navy. The Naval Board advised the Commonwealth Government that compliance with this request would entail placing the Royal Australian Navy on a war footing, mobilising the reserves, and dispatching a 6-inch gun cruiser to the Mediterranean. Much had already been done to bring the ships to a state of war preparedness, and a number of reservist volunteers had been mobilised. In regard to the request as a whole, the Naval Board recommended "most strongly" to the Government that the proposed measures should be taken immediately, at the same time pointing out "that this entails approving that the Imperial War Telegram be obeyed as soon as received. His Majesty's Australian Ships may be in touch with enemy ships at the moment of receiving the Imperial War Telegram and there can be no question of

¹ *Lahn* and *Erlangen* eventually reached Chilean ports; *Cassel* and *Stassfurt* found temporary sanctuary in the Netherlands East Indies. The situation differed considerably from that of 1914. In 1939 German merchant ships had eight days' warning before the outbreak of war, and had time to make neutral ports or to reach the wide ocean spaces en route to such ports. In 1914 they had little or no notice. The masters of some, arriving at Australian ports after hostilities had commenced, were not aware that war had been declared, and 28 were captured in Australian waters.

² *Moreton Bay*, 14,193 tons, Aberdeen and Commonwealth Line; *Arawa*, 14,462 tons, Shaw Savill and Albion. These two vessels were formerly of the Commonwealth Government Line. *Kanimbla*, 10,985 tons, McIlwraith McEachern Ltd, Australian coastal passenger liner. As armed merchant cruisers these three vessels were each fitted with seven 6-in and two 3-in guns. *Change*, 4,324 tons, Australian Oriental Line.

³ She was not ready. In a letter to Hitler, published since the war, Mussolini wrote at this time: "If Germany attacks Poland and the allies of the latter counter-attack Germany, I must emphasise to you that I cannot assume the initiative of warlike operations, given the actual conditions of Italian military preparations which have been repeatedly and in timely fashion pointed out to you. . . . In our previous meetings war was envisaged after 1942, and on this date I should have been ready on land, by sea, and in the air." *Hitler and Mussolini Letters and Documents*, No. 10.

awaiting the Australian War Telegram, because the enemy may commence action."

The matter of the placing of ships, officers and men of the Royal Australian Navy under Admiralty control in time of war is governed by Section 42 of the *Naval Defence Act* of 1910-1934, in which it is among other things enacted that the Governor-General may transfer to the King's Naval Forces any vessel of the Commonwealth Naval Forces and any officers or seamen of the Commonwealth Naval Forces. The procedure to be followed in 1939 was the same as that ruling in 1914, the Governor-General, acting with the advice of the Federal Executive Council, issuing an Order-in-Council for the transfer. But with the imminence of war in 1939 the policy adopted by the Australian Government differed, because of changed circumstances, from that of its predecessor of twenty-five years previously.

When the basis of her naval policy was formulated in 1909, Australia's then Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher, made to the United Kingdom Government an important offer for the automatic amalgamation of the local and Imperial forces in any emergency. This offer was withdrawn by the Deakin Government which replaced Fisher's later in the year, but at the Imperial Conference of 1911 it was settled that "in time of war (or earlier, if the Imperial authorities considered it advisable) the Australian ships would be transferred to Admiralty control", and the exact method of transference was worked out by correspondence between the two Governments during 1912-14.⁴

In the few days immediately previous to the outbreak of war in 1914, the Admiralty had requested certain dispositions of ships of the Australian Squadron, and these were in the process of being made when news of the apparent proximity to Australia of the German naval forces in the Pacific caused the Commonwealth Government to request the Admiralty to let the battle cruiser *Australia*—intended by the Admiralty to join the China Squadron—to search the Bismarck Archipelago before proceeding to her war station, a request to which the Admiralty at once agreed. The day before war was declared, however, the Australian Government telegraphed to the United Kingdom Government, stating that it was "prepared place vessels of Australian Navy under control British Admiralty when desired", and one week later, on 10th August, the transfer was effected by an Order-in-Council, all the vessels of the Commonwealth Naval Forces, and all officers and seamen of those vessels, being transferred to the King's Naval Forces for the duration of the war and "until the issue of a Proclamation declaring that the aforementioned war no longer exists".

⁴ The method was: "On the receipt of a pre-arranged cablegram from the Imperial authorities, the Australian Government would place the Naval Board and the naval services of the Commonwealth directly under the control of the Admiralty. The sea-going fleet would then become a squadron of the Imperial Navy, taking orders either direct from London or from the British officer under whom they were placed. The Naval Board would be placed in the position, with regard to the Admiralty, of a naval commander-in-chief at a British port, and would take orders direct from the Admiralty, informing the Commonwealth Government of these orders. Any important orders issued to Australian ships, or orders involving help that the Board could give would be communicated to the Board by the Admiralty; and other naval officers in high command anywhere would communicate with the Board exactly as they would with fellow-officers of similar rank." See Jose, pp. xxviii, 6-8, for a fuller exposition of the situation in 1914.

The situation in the western Pacific at that time was that the only enemy was Germany, and that the British naval forces of the China Squadron and the Australian Navy were superior, in numbers and power, to the German Squadron of two armoured cruisers, three light protected cruisers, and one light unprotected cruiser. Moreover Japan, although she did not declare war on Germany until 22nd August 1914, was bound by the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, so that her navy could be taken into account as the weapon of a potential active ally.

By 1939 the situation had suffered a drastic change. Germany, at this time again the immediate enemy, had no naval forces in the Pacific. But there was now no Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Instead, there was a Japan aligned by the Anti-Comintern Pact with the enemy Germany and the doubtful Italy; a Japan with which there had been increasing friction over the years with Britain and Australia, and from which signs of hostility had not been wanting; a Japan whose now much more powerful navy had to be taken into account not as the instrument of a potential active ally, but as that of a possible, if not probable, enemy; an enemy, moreover, who, established in the former German islands held under mandate, was now brought dangerously close to Australia in the north. Her navy was now far stronger than such forces as the Royal Navy and the Royal Australian Navy disposed in the western Pacific; and justifiable doubts existed in Australia as to Britain's ability sufficiently to strengthen her forces in the area in the event of Italy entering the war. Furthermore, the conception of the first duties of the separate portions of the Empire in respect of over-all defence had changed with the abandonment by Britain of the two-power naval standard, a change reflected in the resolution passed at the Imperial Conference of 1923, and reaffirmed at subsequent Imperial Conferences—that local defence was the primary responsibility of each portion of the Empire represented at that conference. The Australian Government was thus faced with a heavy responsibility in regard to the disposal of its naval forces in 1939, and it was natural that it should hesitate before effecting an unconditional transfer such as that of 1914.

Conditional approval of the retention of *Perth* overseas had already been given, and an Order-in-Council issued covering her transfer to the King's Naval Forces; but the Government, while approving of the placing of the Royal Australian Navy on a war footing, the mobilising of Reserves, and the acceptance by H.M.A. Ships of the Imperial War Telegram as a notification that hostilities had commenced, without awaiting the Australian War Telegram, would not at this stage approve of the dispatch of a second 6-inch gun cruiser overseas to the Mediterranean. The Acting Chief of the Naval Staff, in a letter of 29th August addressed to the Minister for Defence, reiterated the strong recommendation of the sending of a second cruiser overseas, remarking, among other points made, that New Zealand and India had already placed their naval forces at the Admiralty's disposal. But the Government stood firm in its decision, and on 30th August sent a telegram to the United Kingdom:

In the present international situation the Commonwealth Government desire to place the ships of the Royal Australian Navy and their personnel at the disposal of the United Kingdom Government but find it necessary to stipulate that no ships (other than H.M.A.S. *Perth*) should be taken from Australian waters without prior concurrence of the Australian Government.

In the event, the Government was, before many weeks had passed, to agree to additional Australian ships proceeding overseas. But it was not until 7th November that an Order-in-Council was issued transferring to the King's Naval Forces "all the vessels of the Commonwealth Naval Forces together with the officers and seamen of the Commonwealth Naval Forces, and the personnel of the Royal Australian Air Force, borne on the books of the said vessels"; nor was the transfer made, as in 1914, until the issue of a Proclamation declaring that the war no longer existed, but "until the issue of a further order modifying or annulling this order".⁵ For the time being the situation remained as stated in the Commonwealth Government's telegram of 30th August; and in a reply dated 1st September, the United Kingdom Government expressed its appreciation of the Commonwealth Government's action in the matter.

At dawn on 1st September, the armed forces of Germany invaded Poland. That day mobilisation of the Australian Naval Reserves was ordered, and members were directed to report to their depots or war stations. September 2nd was only five minutes old when the Admiralty Warning Telegram was received at Navy Office, naming Germany and Italy; but an immediately following message stated that Italy's attitude was not defined, and provocative action to that country should be avoided. During the day the Examination Service—by which vessels about to enter a defended port were stopped by the examination steamer under the guns of the shore batteries, and identified before being given permission to enter—was established at all Australian capital city ports, and at Darwin, Port Moresby, and Newcastle.

Following the German attack on Poland, a British ultimatum had been given to Germany at 9.30 p.m. on 1st September, English time. This was followed by a second and final ultimatum at 9 a.m. British summer time on 3rd September. Two hours later Great Britain declared war on Germany, and at 9.50 p.m. the same day, Eastern Australian time, the Imperial War Telegram naming Germany only was received at Navy Office, Melbourne, the Australian War Telegram being dispatched immediately to the Commonwealth's Naval Forces. Shortly following the receipt of the Imperial War Telegram, a further Admiralty message was received at Navy Office. It was: "Commence hostilities at once with Germany."

⁵ The Order-in-Council of 7 November 1939 applied to all the vessels which formed part of the Commonwealth Naval Forces at the time the order was made, but did not, in the opinion of the Attorney-General's Department, affect vessels subsequently acquired or constructed for the Commonwealth Naval Forces. Further orders were, therefore, made from time to time to effect later transfers, such orders being issued on 25 Sep 1940, 5 Mar 1941, 1 Oct 1941, 9 Sep 1942 and 3 Mar 1943. All these orders were eventually annulled by an Order-in-Council of 10 May 1946. The personnel of the RAAF borne on the books of HMA Ships were those in the cruisers carrying aircraft, they being there for the purpose of maintaining and flying the aircraft, the observer and telegraphist air gunner being a naval officer and rating.

CHAPTER 3

AUSTRALIA STATION TO JUNE 1940

MONDAY morning, 4th September 1939, was that of a fine spring day in Sydney. There was reasonable warmth in the air, and the harbour drowsed in sunlight in that atmosphere of peace and quiet gaiety with which blue sky and sparkling waters normally endow it. The outbreak of hostilities was the main topic of conversation and of press report and comment, but there was little else in the superficial scene to suggest that another world war had broken out. For the time, the immediate conflict had the remoteness of an overseas news item.

But the sea is a battlefield over which a disturbance sends widening ripples ranging with a rapidity calling for readiness, however remote one might be from the centre. The day was young in Australia when the first German blow was struck against British shipping on the Atlantic Ocean with the torpedoing by a submarine of the steamer *Athenia* (13,581 tons) —Australians might have pondered on the fact that her Master was Captain James Cook—and the approaches to Sydney Harbour and the Australian coast generally lay, though distantly, within that same battleground.

So such ships of the squadron as were, in the words of the sailing orders, "in all respects ready for sea and to engage the enemy", were away on their war stations, and the waters of Farm Cove danced round tenantless buoys. Commodore Patterson, commanding the squadron in *Canberra*, had sailed late the previous evening, and was patrolling off the New South Wales coast. *Hobart* (Captain Howden¹), which had left Sydney Harbour in company with *Voyager* (Lieut-Commander Morrow²) on the morning of the 3rd, was, at 6 a.m. on this first day of war, watching the trade route between Gabo Island and Wilson's Promontory, with the destroyer in the vicinity of Cape Howe. Dawn found *Vendetta* 100 miles east of Port Stephens, sighting and identifying the British ship *Speybank* (5,154 tons); while at the same time, at the western extremity of Australia's south-eastern focal point, *Vampire* was cruising on and off the trade route off Cape Otway, where she had been looking for the Italian merchant vessel *Romolo* (9,780 tons). *Romolo* had been reported on 31st August in that area but, in the then stage of uncertainty regarding Italy's intentions, had made herself scarce in the sea spaces until, acting on her owner's instructions, she turned up out of the blue at Fremantle on 11th September. The two sloops *Swan* (Lieut-Commander Prevost, R.N.³)

¹ Capt H. L. Howden, CBE; RAN. (In Grand Fleet 1915-18 as Mid and Sub-Lt; HMAS *Sydney* 1918.) Comd HMS *Mantis* on Yangtze-Kiang, China, 1930-32, HMAS *Hobart* 1939-42; Capt Supt Training, Flinders Naval Depot, and comd HMAS *Penguin*, Sydney. Of Fremantle, WA; b. Wellington, NZ, 4 Jul 1896.

² Cmdre J. C. Morrow, CBE, DSO, DSC; RAN. Comd HMAS *Voyager* 1938-41, HMAS *Arunta* 1941-43; Cdr (D) Sydney 1943, Milne Bay 1944-45; Exec Officer HMAS *Shropshire* 1945. Of Blackburn, Vic; b. Melbourne, 6 Feb 1905.

³ Cdr E. J. Prevost, RN. Comd HMAS *Swan* 1939-40; reverted to RN 1944. B. 3 Mar 1900.

and *Yarra* (Lieut-Commander Harrington⁴) were on anti-submarine patrol off Sydney Heads. *Sydney* (Captain J. W. A. Waller, R.N.⁵) was in Western Australia, based on Fremantle.

In Sydney, the squadron's most powerful unit, *Australia*, having been commissioned by Captain Stewart, R.N.,⁶ on 28th August, was still in dockyard hands at Cockatoo Island, putting the final touches to her modernisation refit. The cruiser *Adelaide* (Commander Showers⁷) and the destroyers *Stuart* (Commander H. M. L. Waller, R.A.N.⁸) and *Waterhen* (Lieut-Commander Swain, R.N.⁹) had commissioned from reserve on 1st September and were now alongside at Garden Island ammunitioning, storing and cleaning ship. Fitting out at Cockatoo Island Dockyard, but with some months still to go before they would be completed, were the sloops *Parramatta*¹ and *Warrego*,² which had been launched in November 1938 and May 1939 respectively; while the first of three "Tribal" class destroyers, *Arunta*,³ was on the stocks in the early stages of construction.

There were other activities in Australia's main naval base, echoed in varying degrees in other ports of the Commonwealth. Work was proceeding on vessels requisitioned for conversion to armed merchant cruisers, for which, by arrangement with the Admiralty, crews were to be provided by the Australian Navy, mainly drawn from the reserves. A start was made with the requisitioning of trawlers and other suitable vessels for fitting out as minesweepers;⁴ and in mounting guns on defensively equipped merchant ships for their protection against submarine and air attack.⁵ Gun crews, both for armed merchant cruisers and merchant ships, had to be found by the R.A.N., and on this Monday morning the parade ground

⁴ Rear-Adm W. H. Harrington, DSO; RAN. Comd HMAS *Yarra* 1939-42; in HMAS *Australia* 1942-44; comd HMAS *Quiberon* 1944-45. Of Strathfield, NSW; b. Maryborough, Qld, 17 May 1906.

⁵ Vice-Adm J. W. A. Waller, CB; RN. (HMS's *King Edward VII*, *Royal Oak*, *Marlborough*, 1914-18.) Comd HMAS *Sydney* 1937-39; reverted to RN 7 Jun 1940; comd HMS *Malaya* 1942-44. B. Kingsclere, Hants, Eng, 17 Jan 1892.

⁶ Cmdre R. R. Stewart, RN. On loan from RN Oct 1935; comd HMAS *Hobart* 1938-39, HMAS *Australia* 1939-41; reverted to RN Nov 1941. Cmdre Cdg Londonderry Escort Force 1942-43. B. 25 Oct 1893.

⁷ Rear-Adm H. A. Showers, CBE; RAN. (HMS *Glorious* 1917-18.) Comd HMAS *Adelaide* 1939-42, HMAS *Hobart* 1942-43; CSO to NOIC Sydney 1943-44; comd HMAS *Shropshire* 1944; Second Naval Member, Naval Board 1944-46. Of Preston, Vic; b. Carlton, Vic, 24 May 1899.

⁸ Capt H. M. L. Waller, DSO; RAN. (HMS *Agincourt* 1918.) Comd HMAS *Stuart* 1939-41; Capt (D) 10 Destr Flotilla 1940-41; comd HMAS *Perth* 1941-42. Of Mornington, Vic; b. Benalla, Vic, 4 Apr 1900. Lost in sinking of *Perth* 1 Mar 1942.

⁹ Cdr J. H. Swain, DSO, DSC; RN. On loan from RN May 1938. Comd New Entry School FND 1939, HMAS *Waterhen* 1939-41, reverted RN Jun 1941; OIC Naval Air Stn, Nutt's Cnr 1945. B. 10 May 1905.

¹ HMAS *Parramatta*, sloop (1939), 1,060 tons, three 4-in AA guns, 16.5 kts; sunk off Tobruk, 27 Nov 1941.

² HMAS *Warrego*, sloop (1940), 1,060 tons, four 4-in AA guns, 16.5 kts.

³ HMAS *Arunta*, destroyer (1942), 1,870 tons, eight 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36.5 kts.

⁴ By the end of September eight vessels had been requisitioned as minesweepers, and 26 ships had been fitted out as DEMS; the work being carried out in Sydney and Melbourne.

⁵ Guns mounted were, according to the class of ship, 3-in, 4-in, and/or 6-in. It was possible to equip few ships with both anti-submarine and anti-aircraft armament. As to manning, in 1939 and during the greater part of 1940 the general rule was to embark, when possible, one rating to each gun mounted. Where possible, a gunlayer was drafted in charge of armament, but as the number of gunlayers available was soon exhausted it was found necessary to detail seamen gunners in their place, so that in many cases vessels left Australia with an able seaman gunner in charge of the armament. In view of their importance, three ratings were embarked in tankers, even if armed only with a low-angle gun. Only British ships were being armed at this stage.

at the Naval Reserve Depot at Edgecliff, where a gunnery school had been established on 2nd September, resounded to the shouts of instructors and loading numbers, and the rattle and slam of breech blocks, as ratings, mobilised from reserve, many of them to be afloat in a day or so and in European waters within a few weeks, were licked hurriedly into shape.

Particularly in the smaller ships, where the proportion of reserve ratings was much higher, these were strenuous days of training and shaking down. *Stuart* was typical, her complement consisting of

permanent service ratings, Fleet Reservists and Naval Reservists, the latter forming the greater part of the ship's company. They were mainly young men from various walks of life and were quite "green" regarding naval routine. . . . Day and night practice firing, night encounters with the cruisers and destroyers were carried out in the waters between Jervis Bay and Twofold Bay. During such exercises communications play a vital part, necessitating the presence of all available signal staff; so we were obliged to spend long hours on the bridge, food and sleep being snatched whenever circumstances permitted. We were indeed fortunate in having Commander Waller as Captain. He was an experienced Signals Officer, and fully understanding the difficulties under which we were operating, was ever ready to manipulate one of the signalling projectors when we were hard pressed to cope with traffic to and from several ships at the same time.⁶

Vampire, sailing hurriedly from Port Melbourne, had to complete her complement with some reservists drawn from Depot at the last moment. Passing out through Port Phillip Heads one of the shore forts called her up on the lamp. "Answer the fort," said Walsh to a reserve signal rating standing in the wing of the bridge. "What do I do, sir?" asked the rating. "You're a signalman, aren't you?" asked Walsh. "Well, sir," explained the rating, "they asked me at the depot what I was in civil life, and I said I was a signalman on the railways, and they said 'Right! You're a signalman.'"

Supplementary steps for the safeguarding of merchant ships on the coastal routes, and of defended ports, had been taken. Some days before the outbreak of war a Mercantile Movements Section, manned by reserve officers mostly drawn from shipping offices, had been established with headquarters at Navy Office, Melbourne, and this was functioning fully by the time war was declared, so that the navy had an accurate and continuous plot of every British and Allied merchant vessel on the Australia Station from then on throughout the war. As a protection against mines, instructions had been issued on 2nd September to all British merchant ships to keep where possible outside the 100-fathom line between ports. On the following day the Examination Service was brought into operation at defended ports, and on 4th September the routeing of merchant ships by the Naval Control Service was brought into force.

Within a few hours of the opening of hostilities—at 1.50 a.m. on the 4th—Australia's first shot in the war was fired from a fort at Port Phillip Heads across the bows of a small coastal steamer which failed to stop for the examination vessel after passing through the Rip. "The

⁶ Clifford, *The Leader of the Crocks* (1945), p. 19. (Signalman L. E. S. Clifford, J90808, RAN. HMAS's *Stuart* 1939-41, *Perth* 1941, *Torrens* 1943. Of South Yarra, Vic; b. Lambeth, London, 12 Dec 1901.)

Captain," said the Melbourne *Sun* the following morning, "explained that he had given the name of the ship and thought he could enter without heaving to"; and the paper added severely "he is not likely to repeat the mistake".⁷ In these early days the sudden introduction of the Examination Service caught many coastal mariners by surprise, especially those of the smaller intrastate vessels such as those employed in the Sydney-Newcastle coal trade. With their vessels as well-known along the short run as the local town clocks, to be stopped outside their destination with demands for their ship's name, port of departure and other particulars, and to have to hoist nominated distinguishing signals before entering port, must have been irksome in the extreme to many of the harassed shipmasters. But they cooperated nobly, though not without some hitches. One examination officer recalled a pearly dawn outside Newcastle, a "sixty-miler", flying light with thudding propeller from Sydney to go under the tips for her cargo of coal, and the consternation on board her when she was stopped by the examination vessel and instructed to hoist the distinguishing flags of the day. There was much running up and down the bridge ladder, and an eventual shouted admission through a megaphone that the required flags were not on board, with the result that she was led, like some elderly erring wayfarer, into port under the examination vessel's protective custody.

These, however, were but the incidents of a "working up" period in which the navy, so far as it was then capable, was fulfilling its wartime function of local defence; the protection of floating trade and preparedness against possible coastal raids. It was a working up period which was permitted by Australia's remoteness from the existing centre of conflict. To the extent that it was able to provide local defence, the navy was fitting in to the general picture of Imperial defence. But by the Government's refusal, at this time, to dispatch a second cruiser overseas, the initial dispositions planned by the Admiralty to meet the sudden outbreak of a European war were not carried out fully so far as Australian participation was concerned. The Government was waiting upon events before weakening forces on the Australia Station.

II

It was not long, however, before it was accepted that Germany would be the only active enemy in the immediate future. In reply to a question in the House of Representatives on 12th September, the Minister for External Affairs, Sir Henry Gullett,⁸ said: "The neutrality of both Italy and Japan has been proclaimed and prevails at present." On 15th September the Council of Ministers in Rome defined Italy's attitude as one of non-belligerency. For the time, therefore, it appeared that attacks

⁷ This incident was an historical echo from the first world war. On the morning of 5 Aug 1914, a fort at Port Phillip Heads fired Australia's first shot of that war across the bows of the German steamer *Prinz*.

⁸ Hon Sir Henry Gullett, KCMG. (1st AIF: gnr AFA and official war corresp, Palestine.) Min for External Affrs and for Information 1939-40. B. Harston, Vic, 22 Mar 1878. Killed in aircraft accident 13 Aug 1940.

on floating trade constituted the only threat to the Australia Station. With Germany as the sole enemy, the immediate danger from such attacks was less than in 1914, as there was now no German squadron in the Pacific. German merchant ships distant from the homeland had made for neutral ports when war appeared imminent, and a number had sought refuge in the Netherlands East Indies and in Japan. Some of these vessels were suitable for conversion to armed raiders. But no such conversion of ships interned in the Netherlands East Indies was considered likely, and this view was shortly supported by information from British sources there that the Dutch were taking adequate precautions to prevent them from arming; while on 19th September the British Naval Attaché in Tokyo was told by Japanese naval authorities that the arming of German ships in Japanese ports would not be permitted "as constituting a threat to Japanese neutrality". It seemed, then, that such attacks would be deferred until surface raiders, fitted out in Germany, made their appearance—a matter of some weeks, if not months. To reach Australian waters they would have to evade the British forces operating from strategic bases covering the ocean routes, which forces at the outbreak of war included, adjacent to the Australia Station, Vice-Admiral Leatham's⁹ East Indies Squadron of three cruisers, one submarine and eight escort vessels, and Admiral Sir Percy Noble's¹ China Squadron of four cruisers, five destroyers, sixteen submarines and five escort vessels. The likelihood of German submarines operating in Australian waters so far from their bases was remote.

Nevertheless, reports of submarines off the Australian coast were not wanting. On 2nd September an alleged sighting off Queensland was reported, and a week later was received the second of a series which periodically was to disturb the Naval Staff and local naval authorities over the ensuing months. This report—which resulted in the "Battle of Terrigal"—originated in the statement of two boys who claimed to have seen a submarine on the surface off Terrigal, Broken Bay, twenty miles north of Sydney, at 11.30 on the morning of the 9th. At this time *Stuart*, which had completed her commissioning trials along with *Waterhen*, was alternating with that vessel and *Vendetta* on anti-submarine patrol off Sydney, and was directed to the scene of the alleged sighting, where her detection gear picked up what appeared to be a moving submarine. *Stuart* carried out a depth charge attack early in the evening of the 9th, and launched succeeding attacks during the night. Repercussions carried further than the "crumph" of depth-charges disturbing the sleep of the people of Terrigal. On receiving *Stuart's* report that she was attacking a submarine, the Captain-in-Charge, Sydney, closed that port to all outward traffic, and Newcastle to outward southbound ships and Kembla to

⁹ Admiral Sir Ralph Leatham, KCB, FOC 1 Battle Sqn 1938-39; C-in-C East Indies Stn 1939-41; FOIC Malta 1942-43; C-in-C Plymouth 1943-45. Governor of Bermuda 1946-49. B. 1886. Died 10 Mar 1954.

¹ Admiral Sir Percy Noble, GBE, KCB, CVO. Fourth Sea Lord 1935-37; C-in-C China Stn 1938-40, Western Approaches 1941-42; Head of Brit Naval Delegation in Washington, USA, 1942-44. B. 16 Jan 1880. Died 25 Jul 1955.

outward northbound. A dawn air search by the Royal Australian Air Force on the 10th covering a radius of seventy miles from Broken Bay, was fruitless, and a further search by *Stuart*, assisted by *Waterhen*, disclosed nothing more than the presence of some object which, lying in twenty fathoms of water, was recording on the ships' detection gear. Later examination by a naval diving party proved the object to be rock outcrops with sheer faces approximately twelve feet high, the tidal eddies they caused giving the "movement" effect in the destroyers' instruments.

On 14th September the French merchant vessel *Pierre Loti* (5,114 tons) reported that she was attacked by a submarine in the same area, fifteen miles eastwards of Barrenjoey. *Swan* was sent to investigate, but found nothing. And on the same night an "unknown merchant ship" off the New South Wales coast, approached in darkness and signalled by *Waterhen* by lamp, "switched off her navigation lights and turned away. She was ordered to heave to, and boarded, and proved to be *Dundula*"—a coasting vessel of 3,344 tons—"which had thought *Waterhen* was a submarine." Such happenings were inevitable, though eventually—before Japan's entry into the war, and while the presence of hostile submarines in Australian waters was most unlikely—they proved a source of embarrassment to the Naval Staff, since each report, however improbable, had to be investigated, and it was difficult to convince other authorities that improbabilities were not being treated as impossibilities.² But the "Battle of Terrigal" afforded useful practice to a raw ship's company; it and subsequent "scares" served to keep the whole question alive, and provided valuable experience in cooperative searching exercises by the navy and air force.

III

On the Intelligence side of naval activity, progressive steps had been taken for the safeguarding of information, both as to its possible leakage to the enemy, and its collection as an essential part of naval defence. On 1st September general telegraph and postal censorship was established, and the following day a ban on the publication of information regarding the movements of British and Allied shipping, in press or by broadcast, was imposed. With the outbreak of war the reporting system of the Coastwatching Organisation was brought into operation, and immediate steps were taken to extend its range throughout the island screen to the north and north-east of the continent. At this stage of our story it is desirable to say something about Australian Naval Intelligence in general, and its development of the coastwatching system in particular.

² On 22 Jan 1941 the Minister for Air made a statement to the War Cabinet which indicated that since 13 Dec 1940 eight separate reports had been received of the sighting of submarines from aircraft in Australian waters, but that the naval authorities had expressed the view that it was doubtful if submarines could have been present in the localities referred to. The matter was referred by the War Cabinet to the Chief of the Naval Staff who at the following meeting on 4 Feb was asked why the naval authorities were doubtful whether submarines could have been present. CNS stated that the reports quoted by the Minister for Air "were not as extensive as those which had been received by the naval authorities, and that in no case were such reports regarded lightly. Investigations were made into all such reports received." He summarised the naval view that "whereas it was improbable that reports of the presence of submarines were correct, it was not impossible, and every investigation was made on the receipt of reports".

On a naval station such as the Australian, with its long, often sparsely populated, indented continental coastline, its many islands, and its wide ocean approaches, prompt and accurate operational intelligence is an important weapon. Considerable and valuable naval intelligence work was carried out in Australia during the 1914-18 war, with results of sufficient importance to call from Lord Fisher, in a letter to the then First Naval Member, Admiral Creswell,³ the comment that "the excellence of your Intelligence Service has been our admiration during the war". At that time, however, there had been no Naval Intelligence Division as a separate entity in the Australian naval organisation; the small Intelligence Staff at Navy Office was under the direction of Captain W. H. C. S. Thring who, in addition to being Assistant to the First Naval Member, became Director of Naval Ordnance in 1915 and later was appointed Director of the War Staff. The Intelligence Staff combined other War Staff duties with those of Intelligence, and it was not until July 1918 that the title "Intelligence" appeared in the Royal Australian Navy List, when the designation "R.A.N. War Staff" was expanded to "R.A.N. War Staff and Intelligence Branch". With the end of the war in 1918, the disbandment began of such small Intelligence Staff as existed at Navy Office, and by January 1919, only Captain A. W. Jose—a military officer who acted as Naval Censor, and who was later naval war historian—remained. By January 1921 the title "Intelligence" ceased to appear in Navy Office section designations, the title becoming "Naval Staff Branch".

Lord Jellicoe, in his report of 1919, had pointed out that the Australian Naval Intelligence Division had not been developed as fully as was envisaged by Admiralty, and that it was essential that an efficient large scale organisation should be built up on Royal Navy lines; and that a coastguard service should be formed. In November of that year an Admiralty offer to lend a qualified senior Intelligence officer—who would be paid from Imperial funds—to the Naval Board, was received, and after protracted negotiations, in which the familiar obstacle of "Treasury approval" acted as an efficient brake to progress, Lieut-Colonel F. H. Griffiths, of the Royal Marines, was appointed Director of Naval Intelligence, Navy Office, on 14th January 1922, and the development of Naval Intelligence in Australia can be said to have begun with his appointment and with the establishment of a nucleus permanent Intelligence Staff, which was effected in the same month with the appointment at Navy Office of an Intelligence Clerk, Mr Brooksbank,⁴ who—later to become Civil Assistant to the Director—provided that continuity under a series of part-time directors which was essential to the functioning of the section.

Outside Navy Office, the Australian Naval Intelligence Division consisted of a District Intelligence Officer at Sydney, and the District Naval Officers at Fremantle, Adelaide, Hobart, Melbourne and Brisbane, who

³ Vice-Adm Sir William Creswell, KCMG, KBE; RAN. First Member, Aust Naval Board, 1911-19. Of Silvan, Vic; b. Gibraltar, 20 Jul 1852. Died 20 Apr 1933.

⁴ W. H. Brooksbank, MM. Junior Naval Staff Clerk RAN 1913. (1st AIF: 2/Lt 7 Bn.) Senior Naval Intell Clerk, Navy Office, 1923; Civil Asst to DNI 1939. Of Melbourne; b. Lyndoch, SA, 1 Sep 1895.

devoted to Naval Intelligence such time as they could spare from their other duties. The D.I.O., Sydney, and the D.N.O., Fremantle, had each the help of an Intelligence Clerk; other D.N.O.'s did not have such assistance. Unfortunately, the position of Director of Naval Intelligence as a full-time appointment did not last long. In 1923 Lieut-Colonel Griffiths returned to England, and from then until the appointment of an Assistant Director of Naval Intelligence at Navy Office in 1936, there was no full-time Naval Intelligence officer at Navy Office, the Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff including in his duties those of Director of Naval Intelligence. The officer appointed as Assistant Director of Naval Intelligence in 1936 was Lieut-Commander Long, who had previously been for two years District Intelligence Officer, Sydney. He remained Assistant Director of Naval Intelligence until 25th August 1939, when the Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff was relieved of Intelligence duties and Long was appointed Director of Naval Intelligence, which position he held throughout the war.

Meanwhile the problem of a Coastguard Service had been tackled. Australian conditions—the smallness of population in comparison with the length of coastline, much of which was sparsely inhabited—precluded the formation of a service on the lines of that in Great Britain; but as early as 1919 a proposal had been advanced by the then District Naval Officer, Fremantle, Captain Clare,⁵ for the creation of a Coastwatching organisation whose unpaid civilian members, recruited from selected coastal residents, would report, in time of war, shipping movements, suspicious happenings, and other intelligence likely to be of value. This question was discussed at various times by the Naval Staff, but it was not until January 1922 that the Chief of the Naval Staff issued invitations to the other two Services to a meeting to discuss “the question of coastwatching generally”. The result of this meeting, held the following month, was the formation of an Inter-Services Committee, which held only one meeting, in March 1922, when it was decided “that an organisation is necessary in Australia to enable coastwatching to be instituted in the event of war or when the necessity arises”. It was, however, left to the navy to evolve a detailed scheme which, when finally approved by the Naval Board, was presented to the Military and Air Boards for their information and remarks, and, subsequently being approved by the Minister for Defence, was implemented, and the resulting organisation controlled and operated by the Naval Board through the Naval Intelligence Division.

At first including only the mainland of Australia, the coastwatching service was later extended to the New Guinea and Solomon Islands group, and on the outbreak of war in 1939, over 700 coastwatchers, on the mainland coasts and throughout the islands to the north and north-east of Australia, were ready. The individual coastwatchers had been instructed in the nature of the Intelligence they were to supply. Means of transmission of reports to Navy Office were the normal telegraph channels on the main-

⁵ Capt C. J. Clare, CMG; RAN. (HMAS *Protector*, China War, 1900-1.) Naval Comdt, South Australia 1900-11; DNO Fremantle 1911-19. B. at sea, Bay of Biscay, 23 Jun 1853. Died 27 Sep 1940.

land supplemented by teleradios in outlying districts, teleradios being also used for communication from the islands. One of Long's first actions on the outbreak of war—when money became more easily available—was to appoint a naval officer with intimate knowledge of the islands and island personalities—Lieut-Commander Feldt⁶—as Staff Officer (Intelligence) Port Moresby, with the task of filling the island gaps by the appointment of additional coastwatchers from among planters, missionaries, and other island inhabitants; and to arrange for the supply of additional teleradio machines to ensure prompt communication of Intelligence. The completion of this task occupied the first two years of war. In this period of grace fortunately given on the Australia Station, the Naval Intelligence Division was enabled to carry out plans which had long been formulating, and to close the gaps in the Intelligence fence erected in the island screen of Australia's north and north-east, thus providing an instrument of operational Intelligence which was a major contribution to the conduct of war in the South-West Pacific.

IV

With the units of the squadron brought from reserve becoming effective, it was possible to dispose the ships so as to concentrate force on the two main western and eastern coastal focal points, and on 8th September the destroyers *Voyager* and *Vampire* were sailed from Port Phillip to reinforce *Sydney* based on Fremantle. Originally it had been intended by the Naval Board that the western force should consist of two cruisers—*Sydney* and *Hobart*—and the two destroyers, and on 25th August Rear-Admiral Custance had been so informed. But he replied that he did not consider *Australia* a unit of the squadron until she had completed her trials, and that for the time being *Sydney* should remain the only cruiser at Fremantle. *Hobart* therefore was, on 7th September, directed by the Naval Board to remain in eastern waters under the orders of the commodore commanding the squadron. *Australia* did not complete her trials and join the squadron until 29th September, by which time other factors affecting the future of *Hobart* were developing.

In a Dominions Office cablegram of 8th September the Commonwealth Government was informed that in accordance with suggestions from the Prime Ministers of Canada and New Zealand, the British defence authorities had outlined the naval, military and air cooperation which Britain would appreciate from those Dominions. Mr Bruce—then Australian High Commissioner in London—had asked that similar suggestions should be drawn up regarding Australian cooperation, and these were accordingly now put forward. Among the suggestions as to Australian naval cooperation—which suggestions were based on the assumption that Japan would be neutral—the cablegram stated that it would be appreciated if a second cruiser and the five destroyers could be lent for service other than on

⁶ Cdr E. A. Feldt, OBE; RAN. (HMS *Canada* 1917-18; HMS *Sybilie* 1918.) Resigned Navy 1923; joined New Guinea Administration, Patrol Officer, District Officer; Mining Warden Wau 1939. SO(1) Port Moresby 1939-41; Supervising Intell Offr N.E. Area 1941-43; NOIC Torokina 1945. Of Brisbane; b. Ingham, Qld, 3 Jan 1899.

the Australia Station; if two local armed merchant cruisers could be taken up, equipped and manned by Australia—these being additional to those already taken up on Admiralty account—and if facilities for building destroyers and escort vessels at Cockatoo Island could be increased, and consideration be given to building local defence whale catcher and trawler type vessels in private yards. In making the request for a second cruiser and the destroyers, the cablegram remarked that with Japan neutral Australia was unlikely to suffer submarine attacks, and the cruisers remaining on the station should be adequate to deal with such surface raiders as Germany might send out. Reference was made also to earlier Admiralty proposals that Australia should acquire a capital ship, it being stated that such proposals “can no longer be considered owing to our immediate requirements”.

This Admiralty view was supported by the Australian Naval Staff which, in a Navy Department minute of 26th September addressed to the Department of Defence, recommended approval of the British Government's suggestions and, referring to the former recommendation of the dispatch of a second cruiser overseas, remarked that “with two cruisers playing their part in the defence of sea communications to and from Australia in distant waters, the best distribution of our available force is achieved”. The Naval Staff agreed that so long as Japan remained neutral it was unlikely that enemy submarines would be operating in Australian waters, and that the destroyers should be made available for service overseas forthwith. Actually these vessels were—the Naval Staff pointed out—on loan to the Australian Navy from the Admiralty, although no reference had been made by the British Government to this fact. The penultimate note on the question of Australian capital ships was sounded in this minute with the remark that “it is appreciated that the acquisition by Australia of one or more capital ships must be postponed, but their necessity should be borne in mind”.

The matter was discussed at a War Cabinet meeting on 6th October at which Admiral Colvin—who had arrived in Australia and resumed duty as First Naval Member and Chief of the Naval Staff three days earlier—was present, when reference was made to a telegram of 2nd October from Mr Bruce advising that the Admiralty had asked if the five destroyers could proceed at once to Singapore for intensive training. Admiral Colvin recommended approval of the request⁷ and, on the question of releasing a cruiser from the station, expressed the view that the station was over-insured and that a cruiser could be spared, particularly if two armed merchant cruisers were taken up. The War Cabinet accordingly approved of the dispatch of the destroyers to Singapore, and of the placing of a second 6-inch gun cruiser at the disposal of the British Government, with the proviso that, having regard to the international situation, the cruiser should not proceed west of Suez, and that should Far Eastern complications arise, all Australian vessels would return to

⁷ On 27 Sep Naval Board had decided that the anti-submarine patrol off Sydney could be discontinued “until there are indications that submarines are operating in Australian waters”. (NID War Diary.)

Australian waters, their pre-arranged station in an Eastern war. It was also approved that the Commonwealth would take up, equip, and man two local armed merchant cruisers.

Eight days later H.M.A.S. *Hobart* and the five destroyers sailed from Australia for Singapore. *Hobart* departed from Sydney shortly before midnight on the 13th, and *Stuart*, *Vendetta* and *Waterhen* left that port at 9 o'clock the following morning, all four vessels proceeding north-about via Darwin and Lombok Strait. *Vampire* and *Voyager* sailed from Fremantle on 14th October for Singapore direct, via Sunda Strait. All the ships reached their destination before the end of the month.

They were still on passage, however, when a further request regarding the destroyers was received from the Admiralty. A signal of 16th October to the Naval Board advised that in view of urgent requirements for destroyers in Home waters it had been found necessary to withdraw the 8th Flotilla from the Mediterranean, and it was therefore desired that the five Australian destroyers should proceed as soon as possible to the Mediterranean from Singapore.

This signal—presumably because it was decided in London that the approach should have been on Government level—was cancelled by the Admiralty the following day, but in the meantime Admiral Colvin, in a minute of 17th October, had recommended to the Minister for Defence approval of the request in the Admiralty's signal of the 16th, and the request and recommendation were considered at a meeting of the War Cabinet on the 17th. Contingent on Admiral Colvin furnishing a minute to the effect that the submarine menace in Australia was now negligible, and that the best means of cooperating in Empire defence was to send the destroyers to the Mediterranean, the War Cabinet decided to agree to the Admiralty's request, though, as Admiral Colvin informed the First Sea Lord in a personal signal of 21st October, with some misgiving, having regard to the dearth of suitable anti-submarine vessels in Australian waters, and the possibility of extension of submarine warfare to these waters, and the possibility of serious deterioration in the Far East situation as regards both Japan and Russia. Colvin added that the Japanese and Far Eastern Russian aspects loomed large in Australia, and the Government was bound to consider the effect on public opinion; but the foregoing remarks were not intended to suggest that any action by the Admiralty, actual or proposed, should be unduly circumscribed, but to give local background. "The Australian Government would definitely not wish to impede any dispositions regarded as essential."

A result of this signal was the offer by the Admiralty of a *quid pro quo*. The First Sea Lord replied on 27th October that the Secretary of State had cabled to the Commonwealth Government proposals which it was hoped would be acceptable. These proposals, communicated to the Prime Minister by the British High Commissioner in Australia, Sir Geoffrey Whiskard, in a letter of 30th October, were that the Australian destroyers should be made available for service in the Mediterranean, and that in

return the Admiralty would send two "C" or "D"⁸ class cruisers to the Australia Station. This letter was considered at a meeting of the Full Cabinet on 31st October and the proposals approved, and on 4th November the Naval Board informed the Admiralty of the Commonwealth Government's approval that the destroyers should proceed to the Mediterranean.

Actually the Government's decision, reached "with some misgiving" though it was, had been known to the Admiralty since Colvin's signal of 21st October. But at the time of the Naval Board's signal of 4th November some doubts as to the Commonwealth's intentions apparently existed in Government circles in Britain, for in a letter addressed by Sir Geoffrey Whiskard to the Prime Minister on that same day, reference was made to the misgivings with which it was understood the Commonwealth Government was prepared to agree to the transfer of the destroyers. Australia's freedom from the likelihood of submarine attack was again stressed, and the suitability of the proposed "C" or "D" class cruisers for operations against armed merchant cruisers was emphasised. They had one-third greater endurance than the Australian destroyers, and could leave Britain for the Australia Station the following month. The letter went on to say that in the event of Japanese or Russian intervention, with the possibility of submarines operating in Australian waters, the Australian destroyers would be returned, or would be relieved by ships of the Royal Navy fitted for anti-submarine work.

Apparently, however, the Naval Board's signal of 4th November dispelled any doubts in London, and on 10th November Mr Bruce telegraphed to the Commonwealth Government the British Government's thanks for making the destroyers available in the Mediterranean. The following day an Admiralty signal informed the Naval Board that the Dominions Office had been asked to request the Commonwealth Government to order the destroyers to the Mediterranean without further delay, the position having become one of urgency, while in the same message the Naval Board was advised that the proposed cruisers were on the Northern Patrol and could not leave Great Britain until towards the end of January. "Hope you will appreciate." On 12th November the Naval Board signalled the Rear-Admiral, Malaya, advising him of the Admiralty's request, and asking him to issue the necessary sailing orders accordingly. On the same day a Naval Board signal informed the Admiralty of this action, and added that the proposed arrangements for the cruisers were satisfactory and the necessity for the delay in sending them to Australia understood.⁹ On 13th November, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the five Australian destroyers sailed from Singapore, and by the time the Dominions Office request for per-

⁸ "C" class (1918), 4,200 tons, five 6-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 29 kts.

"D" class (1919), 4,850 tons, six 6-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 29 kts.

⁹ The delay was much greater than then anticipated, and in the event the cruisers never served on the Australia Station. The two "C" class vessels *Colombo* and *Ceres* were assigned to the Australia Station by the Admiralty, and in May 1940 were at Singapore en route. But at a meeting of the War Cabinet on 22 May 1940 it was approved that "in view of the present situation and more urgent need of cruisers on other stations, *Ceres* and *Colombo* now at Singapore should not come to Australia but that Admiralty should be informed that the Commonwealth Govt is prepared for them to be utilised elsewhere".

mission for their transference was passed to the Commonwealth Government by Sir Geoffrey Whiskard on the 14th, were at sea en route to the Mediterranean.

The close relationship which existed between the Naval Board and the Admiralty is illustrated in this episode by the exchange of personal signals between the First Naval Member and the First Sea Lord; a practice most beneficial in giving each naval authority local background from the other side, and in preparing the way for naval interchanges on Government level. Armed with the background information thus transmitted, each Service chief was the better enabled to advise his Minister, lessening any chance of disagreement on a possibly vital naval matter between the two Governments. Above all, as was shown in this instance, the practice made possible a saving of time enabling the fullest exploitation of that mobility which is a major factor in naval strategy, and which was of particular importance in the existing attenuation of British naval forces, of which the R.A.N. was a part.

V

Britain's naval policy, and her plans for any naval war had, over her many years of extensive maritime trade, been conditioned by the knowledge that the destruction of that trade would be a prime object of an enemy. Where an enemy was not strong enough to challenge to fleet action, its own dispersed floating trade would be driven to seek protection in neutral ports—as happened to German trade in 1914 and again in 1939—and it would be reduced to carrying on a *guerre de course* against British trade by such means as remained at its disposal. This had happened in successive naval wars in Britain's considerable experience. The introduction by Germany of war on commerce by submarine, by aircraft, by surface raider and by mine was, therefore, anticipated as inevitable—and was, so far as submarine attack was concerned, realised within a few hours of the opening of hostilities.

For the first few weeks of the war there was, however, no attack by German surface vessels, although as early as 27th August the Naval Board had been advised by the Admiralty that there was a possibility that two German armoured ships—"pocket battleships" of the *Deutschland*¹ class—were at large in the Atlantic. Two pocket battleships were in fact at sea though this was not known with certainty by the Admiralty until the 21st October when the Norwegian tanker *Kongsdal* (9,959 tons) reported at Kirkwall that she had been stopped in the North Atlantic by the *Deutschland*. Meanwhile, the British steamer *Clement* (5,051 tons) had been sunk off Pernambuco by the *Graf Spee* on the 30th September, though survivors' reports, which reached the Admiralty on 1st October, indicated that the raider was the *Admiral Scheer*.

It was learned after the war that, until early 1939, German accelerated naval rearmament was based by the Naval High Command on Hitler's

¹ *Deutschland* (later renamed *Lützow*), *Admiral Scheer*, *Admiral Graf Spee*, armoured ships, built early 1930's, 10,000 tons (Washington) actual approx 14,000, six 11-in and eight 5.9-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 26 kts. (*Admiral Graf Spee* was scuttled by Germans off Montevideo 17 Dec 1939.)

assurance that war with England would not eventuate before 1944 or 1945, by which time Grand Admiral Raeder, the German Commander-in-Chief, hoped to have a large number of units including thirteen battleships, twenty cruisers, two aircraft carriers and 172 submarines, with destroyers and other smaller vessels; a force strong enough seriously to challenge British sea power. By the spring of 1939, however, it was clear to the German Naval Staff that war with Britain would come earlier. Long-term shipbuilding plans were shelved, and the Germans concentrated on constructing a fleet capable of dealing sharp hit-and-run blows against British sea communications, first priority being given to submarines and battleships. By 1st September 1939 the German Fleet consisted of two battleships, *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*; two battleships approaching completion, *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz*; three "pocket battleships", *Deutschland*, *Scheer*, and *Graf Spee*; three heavy cruisers, *Hipper*, *Blücher*, and *Prinz Eugen*, this last named still completing; five light cruisers, *Königsberg*, *Nürnberg*, *Leipzig*, *Köln* and *Karlsruhe*; fifty-seven submarines, and a number of destroyers and smaller units. There were two old battleships, *Schlesien* and *Schleswig-Holstein*, and the cruiser *Emden* in the training flotilla.² Twenty-six merchant vessels were to be converted to armed merchant cruisers.

On 10th May 1939, Hitler issued a "Directive for the uniform preparation of War by the Armed Forces, 1939-40", in which the navy was directed "to make its own preparations for the war against British and French merchant shipping". Fleet actions were to be avoided, and Raeder was to concentrate on war on trade. For this the submarine was an obvious weapon, but Raeder appreciated also the value of powerful surface ships acting independently against unescorted single ships and lightly protected convoys. Accordingly eighteen submarines were sent out between 19th and 21st August to positions to the north and north-west of Britain, and on 21st August the *Graf Spee*—whose supply ship *Altmark* (12,000 tons) had sailed some days earlier—left Germany and proceeded north about the British Isles to her operating area off South America, being followed three days later by *Deutschland* and her supply ship *Westerwald* (12,000 tons), who were to operate in the North Atlantic. The tasks

² *Scharnhorst*, German battleship (1939), 26,000 tons, nine 11-in and twelve 5.9-in guns, 27 kts; sunk by British forces off North Cape, 26 Dec 1943.

Gneisenau, German battleship (1938), 26,000 tons, nine 11-in and twelve 5.9-in guns, 27 kts; sunk as block ship, Gdynia, Mar 1945.

Admiral Hipper, German cruiser (1939), 15,200 tons, eight 8-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts; stranded at Kiel, 1945.

Blücher, German cruiser (1939), 15,200 tons, eight 8-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts; sunk by Norwegian coastal batteries, 9 Apr 1940.

Prinz Eugen, German cruiser (1940), 15,200 tons, eight 8-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts; sunk Bikini atom bomb test 24 Jul 1946.

Königsberg, German cruiser (1929), 6,000 tons, nine 5.9-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts; sunk by Brit aircraft, 9 Apr 1940.

Nürnberg, German cruiser (1935), 6,000 tons, nine 5.9-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts; handed over to Russia after the war.

Leipzig, German cruiser (1931), 6,000 tons, nine 5.9-in and sixteen AA guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts.

Köln, German cruiser (1930), 6,000 tons, nine 5.9-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts.

Karlsruhe, German cruiser (1929), 6,000 tons, nine 5.9-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts; sunk by British submarine *Truant*, 9 Apr 1940.

Schlesien and *Schleswig-Holstein*, German battleships (1908), 13,040 tons, four 11-in and ten 5.9-in guns, 18 kts.

Emden, German cruiser (1925), 5,400 tons, eight 5.9-in guns, four 19.7-in torp tubes, 27.5 kts.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin, Chief of
Australian Naval Staff 1937-41.



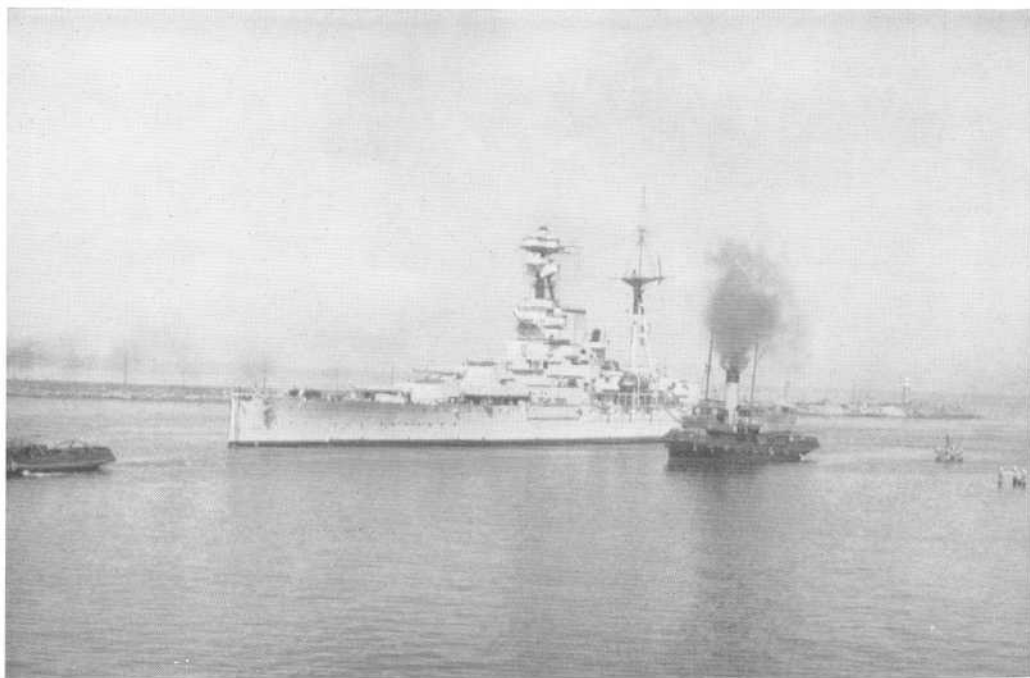
(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Rear-Admiral J. G. Crace, Rear-Admiral
Commanding Australian Squadron 1939-42.



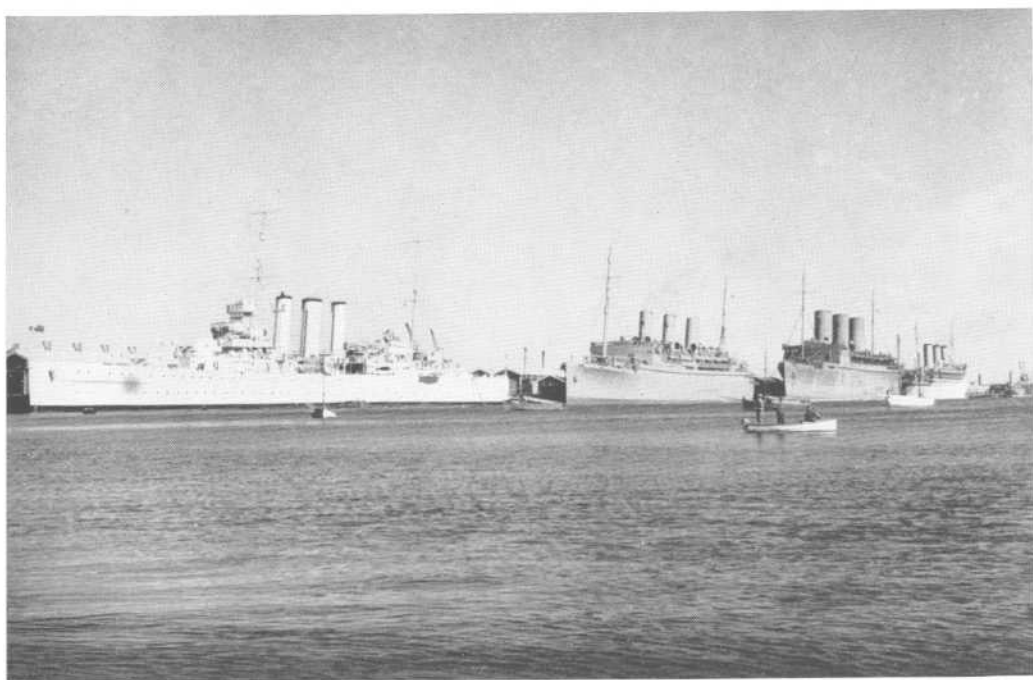
(Department of Information)

Gunnery Training: Crew of a 4-inch Gun at H.M.A.S. *Rushcutter*.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

H.M.S. *Ramillies* in Fremantle Harbour, 21st April 1940.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Convoy "U.S.3" in Fremantle Harbour 11th May 1940: H.M.A.S. *Canberra*, *Empress of Canada*, *Empress of Britain* and *Empress of Japan*.

of the two "pocket battleships" as defined in their operational orders were the

disruption and destruction of enemy merchant shipping by all possible means. . . . Enemy naval forces, even if inferior, are only to be engaged if it should further the principal task. . . . Frequent changes of position in the operational areas will create uncertainty and will restrict enemy merchant shipping, even without tangible results. A temporary departure into distant areas will also add to the uncertainty of the enemy. If the enemy should protect his shipping with superior forces so that direct successes cannot be obtained, then the mere fact that his shipping is so restricted means that we have greatly impaired his supply situation. Valuable results will also be obtained if the pocket battleships continue to remain in the convoy area.

As Mr Churchill said later, "With all this wisdom the British Admiralty would have been in rueful agreement."³

With the outbreak of war, then, units of the German Navy were at sea and ready to strike. The submarines did so from the evening of 3rd September, and by the end of the month had sunk 137,084 tons of British shipping. But it was not until the last day of September that a ship was attacked by a surface raider. This delay on the part of the pocket battleships was the result of a conference between Raeder and Hitler on 7th September, when it was agreed—on Raeder's suggestion that since, after the imminent collapse of Poland, France (who would like to stay out of the war) and Britain might be ready to accept the situation—that an attack should not be forced, that submarines should be instructed not to attack passenger ships and French ships, and that *Graf Spee* and *Deutschland* should hold back and withdraw for the time being. The pocket battleships were accordingly sent to their respective "waiting areas", and no indication of their presence became known to the British. But by 23rd September the German Naval Staff, seeing British convoy and other defence measures materialising, chafed at the restrictions imposed on their operations, and at a further conference on that date Hitler agreed to the pocket battleships being "committed" about the beginning of October "so that their supplies will not be exhausted or their morale undermined". On 26th September the two ships were ordered to leave their waiting areas and commence hostilities against British merchant shipping, and on 30th September (as mentioned above) *Clement* was sunk by *Graf Spee*, the news being received by the Naval Board from the Admiralty on 1st October. The Admiralty's immediate reaction was the formation of a number of "hunting groups", six of which operated in the Atlantic, while of the other three one, consisting of the cruisers *Sussex* and *Shropshire*, was off the Cape of Good Hope; one, comprising the cruisers *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire* and the aircraft carrier *Eagle*, was based on Ceylon; and the third, the battleship *Malaya* and aircraft carrier *Glorious*, was stationed in the Gulf of Aden area.⁴ No immediate action

³ Churchill, Vol I, p. 403.

⁴ HMS *Sussex*, cruiser (1929), 9,830 tons, eight 8-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 32.25 kts.
HMS *Shropshire*, cruiser (1929), 9,830 tons, eight 8-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 32.25 kts;
transferred to RAN Jun 1943 to replace loss of HMAS *Canberra* 9 Aug 1942.

was taken by the Naval Board to redispense ships of the Australian Squadron.

After this initial attack, nothing further was heard of the *Graf Spee* for more than three weeks, but on 7th October the Admiralty reported that there was little doubt that a German pocket battleship and armed merchant cruiser were operating in the South Atlantic, and that probably the policy of surface raiders was now in force, and they might be expected in any area. In point of fact, between 5th and 10th October *Graf Spee* sank three more ships in the South Atlantic; but they failed to transmit distress messages, and their loss was not known until later. But on 22nd October the silence was broken when she struck again in the Atlantic and her victim, the motor vessel *Trevanion* (5,299 tons), managed to broadcast a distress message before being sunk. In this attack *Graf Spee* scored a hit on Australia's overseas communications, for *Trevanion* had sailed from Port Pirie for Great Britain on 14th September, and was the first ship engaged in the Australian trade to be sunk in the war. There followed another silence of nearly a month, while hunting groups sought for the raider over wide expanses of ocean. On 1st November the Admiralty repeated the warning that surface attacks might now be expected in any area, and on the 9th reported that a German warship, believed to be the *Scheer*—the impression held by survivors from the *Clement* having been accepted—might have worked round the Cape, and could appear on Indian Ocean routes about 10th November.

This appreciation was sound. On 15th November a small British tanker, *Africa Shell* (706 tons), was attacked and sunk in the Mozambique Channel almost within territorial waters of Portuguese East Africa, survivors stating that their attacker was a light cruiser. The report of this sinking was received by the Naval Board on 16th November in a signal from the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, Vice-Admiral Leatham, who advised the Admiralty that he had disposed the following forces for the protection of trade and the possible interception of the raider: the battle-ships *Malaya* and *Ramillies*, and the aircraft carrier *Glorious* in the Socotra area; the cruisers *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire*, the aircraft carrier *Eagle*, and two Australian destroyers (*Waterhen* and *Vendetta*) in the Ceylon area; the cruiser *Kent* and French cruiser *Suffren* and two Australian destroyers (*Voyager* and *Vampire*) off Achin Head, Sumatra; H.M.A.S. *Hobart* to the northward of fifteen degrees north and eastward of sixty degrees east in the Arabian Sea; the battle cruiser *Renown* and aircraft carrier *Ark Royal* to round the Cape from the Atlantic and operate in the Madagascar area; while the cruiser *Gloucester* and the French sloop

HMS *Cornwall*, cruiser (1928), 10,000 tons, eight 8-in guns, 31.5 kts; sunk by Jap aircraft in Indian Ocean 5 Apr 1942.

HMS *Dorsetshire*, cruiser (1930), 9,975 tons, eight 8-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 32.25 kts; sunk by Jap aircraft in Indian Ocean, 5 Apr 1942.

HMS *Eagle*, aircraft carrier (1924), 22,600 tons, nine 6-in and four 4-in AA guns, twenty-one aircraft, 24 kts; sunk by submarine in Western Mediterranean, 11 Aug 1942.

HMS *Malaya*, battleship (1916; reconstructed and refitted 1937), 31,100 tons, eight 15-in and twelve 6-in guns, 25 kts.

HMS *Glorious*, aircraft carrier (1917 as cruiser, completed 1930 as aircraft carrier), 22,500 tons, sixteen 4.7-in guns, forty-eight aircraft, 30 kts; sunk off Norway 8 Jun 1940.

Rigault de Genouilly were to watch the Madagascar-Seychelles area, and the fifth Australian destroyer (*Stuart*) was to cooperate with a submarine in the vicinity of the Maldiva and Chagos Islands.⁶

On 1st November Rear-Admiral Crace⁶, an Australian-born officer in the British service, whose appointment as successor to Rear-Admiral Custance had been announced on 16th September, had assumed command of the Australian Squadron, hoisting his flag in *Canberra*. The Naval Board informed him of the dispositions made in the Indian Ocean to counter raider activity there, and said that for the time no alteration was intended in the dispositions on the Australia Station, similarly informing the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies. With the arrival of *Canberra* and *Australia* in Melbourne on 20th November the strategic position was reviewed at a conference at Navy Office which Crace attended. The situation as seen was that the existing German raider policy was to attack isolated merchant ships off the main trade routes and at widely separated points with the object of causing the maximum dispersal of British naval forces. The sinking of *Africa Shell* on 15th November disclosed the presence of a raider in the Indian Ocean, and naval dispositions had been made there to meet the threat. On the other hand, raider activity in the Pacific could not be discounted. Intelligence indicated that the German merchant ships *Lahn* (8,498 tons) and *Tacoma* (8,268 tons) had left the Chilean port of Concepcion on 9th November, and there were more recent reports of raider activity in South American waters. Until the danger in the Pacific was removed, and attack from that direction became most unlikely, it was decided to retain *Canberra* and *Australia* to protect trade in south-eastern Australian waters. The New Zealand Naval Board was informed of this decision and of the appreciation which led to it.

There was sound reasoning behind this conclusion. It was not clear to the Admiralty whether more than one raider was attacking in the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. *Clement* survivors believed their assailant to have been *Scheer*. *Africa Shell's* people described theirs as a light cruiser.⁷ With the silence from the Atlantic it was possible for a raider to have doubled the Horn into the Pacific, and the reported departure from

⁶ HMS *Ramillies*, battleship (1917; refitted 1926-27), 29,150 tons, eight 15-in and twelve 6-in guns, 21 kts.

HMS *Kent*, cruiser (1928), 10,000 tons, eight 8-in guns, 31.5 kts; scrapped 1946.

Suffren, French cruiser (1930), 9,938 tons, eight 8-in guns, six 21.7-in torp tubes, 32.5 kts.

HMS *Renown*, battle cruiser (1916; reconstructed 1936-39), 32,000 tons, six 15-in and ten 4.5-in guns, 29 kts.

HMS *Ark Royal*, aircraft carrier (1938), 22,000 tons, sixteen 4.5-in guns, seventy aircraft, 30.75 kts; torpedoed east of Gibraltar and foundered while in tow, 14 Nov 1941.

HMS *Gloucester*, cruiser (1939), 9,600 tons, twelve 6-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts; sunk by enemy aircraft off Crete, 22 May 1941.

Rigault de Genouilly, French sloop (1932), 1,969 tons, three 5.4-in guns, 17 kts; sunk by British submarine off Algiers, 3 Jul 1940.

⁶ Admiral Sir John Crace, KBE, CB. (HMAS *Australia* 1913-17.) Comd HMS *Valhalla* 1928; NA to Second Sea Lord 1937-39; comd RAN Sqn 1939-42. Of Hawkey, Hants, Eng; b. Canberra, 6 Feb 1887.

⁷ That *Africa Shell's* attacker was a pocket battleship was suggested by a report from the Dutch steamer *Mapia* (9,389 tons) that she had been stopped by *Scheer* off the east coast of South Africa on 16 Nov, but allowed to proceed. This report, however, was not received until *Mapia's* arrival at Singapore on 2 Dec. A cinematograph film of the raider taken from the *Mapia* was developed at Singapore and showed her to be a pocket battleship, though it did not determine whether *Scheer* or *Spee*.

Concepcion of *Lahn* and *Tacoma*, perhaps to act as supply ships, lent colour to this possibility. *Achilles*,⁸ which had left New Zealand on 29th August, had been on patrol off the west coast of South America—the only warship in those waters—from 12th September until 2nd October when, on receipt of the news of the attack on *Clement*, she had been ordered to join the South America Division of Commodore Harwood⁹ in the South Atlantic, and had passed through the Strait of Magellan on 19th-20th October. The cruiser *Leander* of the New Zealand Squadron remained the only ship additional to the Australian cruisers in the south-west Pacific with its heavy concentration of British trade.

But within a few days the Pacific situation had cleared somewhat with the reported arrival of *Lahn* and *Tacoma* at Montevideo in the Atlantic on 23rd November, and the consequent lessening of the likelihood that a raider was west of the Horn. With the certainty that a raider had been in the Indian Ocean at any rate on 15th November, the Naval Board decided that the apparent removal of a threat from the east warranted the dispatch of forces to the west. *Canberra* and *Australia* were accordingly ordered to Western Australia to be on the trade routes there by the time *Africa Shell's* raider could have reached that area, and adjoining stations were advised that they would be on patrol off the Leeuwin from 29th November to 2nd December, and would then return to the south-east coast. During this period, on receipt of intelligence that the raider might attempt to meet one of the German merchant ships which had sought refuge in Padang, and subsequently slip through the Netherlands East Indies archipelago to make for Vladivostock, the Royal Australian Air Force was requested to establish a patrol over the Timor Sea.

Canberra and *Australia* accordingly sailed from south-eastern Australia on 25th November, and from 28th November to 2nd December—during which period the coastal steamer *Katoomba* (9,424 tons), carrying troops from Western Australia to eastern States, was escorted past the Leeuwin—a patrol was carried out across the Indian Ocean trade routes converging on Fremantle, *Australia* covering an area approximately 110 miles south-west of Rottnest Island, with *Canberra* seventy miles, and *Sydney*—of which ship Captain Collins¹ had assumed command on 16th November—137 miles to the northward of her. R.A.A.F. aircraft based on Pearce cooperated by searching along the routes to a depth of 100 miles from Rottnest.

In the meantime, the Admiralty had established a patrol—*Sussex*, *Shropshire*, *Ark Royal* and *Renown*—south of the Cape of Good Hope, to prevent the passage of enemy ships between the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. But this move was forestalled by the rapidity of *Spee's* withdrawal

⁸ HMS *Achilles*, cruiser (1933), 7,030 tons, eight 6-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 32.5 kts. With sister ship *Leander* lent to New Zealand.

⁹ Admiral Sir Henry Harwood, KCB, OBE; RN. Comd S. Amer Div 1936-40; Asst Ch of Naval Staff 1940-42; C-in-C Mediterranean Fleet 1942, Levant 1943, Orkney and Shetlands 1944-45. B. 19 Jan 1888. Died 9 Jun 1950.

¹ Collins was succeeded as ACNS, Navy Office, by Capt Burnett. Capt J. W. A. Waller reverted to the RN.

(Capt J. Burnett, RAN. HMAS *Australia* 1917-18. ACNS 1939-41; comd HMAS *Sydney* 1941. Of Melbourne; b. 21 Dec 1899. Lost in sinking of *Sydney*, 19 Nov 1941.)

from the Indian Ocean. The raider—as was subsequently learned—had doubled the Cape west bound, and well to the south, on 20th November, had met *Altmark*, transferred prisoners and refuelled, and was again in the Atlantic and ready for further action. On 3rd December—the day on which *Australia* and *Canberra* left their Western Australia patrol for the south-east of the continent—the Naval Board received the report of the sinking in the Atlantic on the previous day of the Blue Star liner *Doric Star* (10,086 tons) soon followed by that of a then unknown ship, later found to be the Shaw Savill *Tairoa* (7,983 tons), in the vicinity. These attacks were again on Australian trade, both ships being bound from Australia to Britain with valuable cargoes. Defensively Equipped Merchant Ship ratings of the R.A.N.R., who were in charge of the guns of these ships, were the first Australian naval men to become prisoners-of-war in the 1939-45 conflict.

Her attacks on these two ships, both of which succeeded in dispatching wireless messages giving the raider's position, led to *Graf Spee's* interception by Commodore Harwood's South America Division, and the Battle of the River Plate on 13th December. The pocket battleship was driven into Montevideo, where she was scuttled by her crew in the River Plate estuary on 17th December, the German merchant ship *Tacoma*—whose departure with *Lahn* from Concepcion had earlier influenced the Australian Squadron dispositions—accompanying her from Montevideo to the scuttling position to remove her crew.

The initial cruise of *Deutschland*, confined to the North Atlantic, had been short, and the elimination of *Graf Spee* apparently removed for the time being the menace of surface raiders. On 15th December Admiral Colvin was able to inform the Acting Minister for the Navy, Mr Street,² that according to the latest intelligence the two remaining pocket battleships were in German home waters, and the possibility of raiding cruisers being at large was much reduced. It is now known that³ *Deutschland* had operated in the area between the Azores and the North American coast and by 15th October had sunk two merchant ships, and taken one—the American *City of Flint* (3,327 tons)—in prize. She then returned to Germany under orders from Hitler, who was concerned at the effect her possible loss would have on German morale, because of her name. She arrived at Gotenhafen on 13th November, her name later being changed to *Lützow*. The two new battleships, *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, made a brief sortie into the North Atlantic on 21st November. Two days later they encountered the armed merchant cruiser *Rawalpindi*⁴—she thought she had met *Deutschland* and reported accordingly—which ship they destroyed in the unequal contest. But their presence thus disclosed, and

² On 15 Nov 1939 the Prime Minister told Parliament that the Defence Department was being divided to cope with increased administrative work, and separate Ministers for Army, Navy and Air had been appointed, the activities of the departments being coordinated by a Minister for Defence Coordination. Sir Frederick Stewart had been sworn in as Minister for the Navy, Mr Street as Minister for the Army, Mr J. V. Fairbairn as Minister for Air, and the Prime Minister as Minister for Defence Coordination. Mr Street was also Acting Minister for the Navy.

³ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs* 1939.

⁴ *HMS Rawalpindi*, armed merchant cruiser (1925), 16,697 tons, seven 6-in guns, 17 kts.

the hunt too hot, they abandoned their cruise, successfully eluded their British pursuers, and reached Germany, their arrival in the Baltic becoming known to the Admiralty. So, for the time, the surface of the seas appeared to be clear.

VI

In this period the danger of raiders, more especially in the Indian Ocean, was of particular concern to the Commonwealth Government. On 15th September the Prime Minister had announced the Government's decision to raise an infantry division for service at home or abroad. The recruiting and equipping of this force had gone ahead with dispatch, and by December plans for the embarkation of the first brigade group of the "Second A.I.F.", as this force was designated, for training in the Middle East, were under discussion. Similar arrangements for sending an expeditionary force overseas had been made by New Zealand, and the first contingents from the two Dominions were to sail in a joint convoy for the Middle East. The safety of this convoy was a paramount concern of the two Governments and their navies.

The provision of vessels for British military transport was the responsibility of the Director of Sea Transport, Admiralty, who requisitioned and allocated ships as required. Appropriate organisations were established overseas to cooperate with his Directorate, and in Australia the Naval Board link was through a Transport Committee at Navy Office, with Naval Transport Officers and staffs at the various ports.⁵ On 30th November the Transport Committee was informed of the decision to send a contingent overseas, and arrangements were made, after consultation with the Director of Sea Transport, to detain the P. and O. liner *Strathallan* (23,722 tons) in Melbourne to carry the advanced party of the A.I.F. and the New Zealand force to the Middle East. The New Zealand party of twenty-five officers and eighty-eight other ranks reached Melbourne and embarked with the Australian party of forty-seven officers and fifty-eight other ranks on 15th December, *Strathallan* sailing independently on that day. She was given air cover where possible while in Australian waters, and was escorted round the Leeuwin by H.M.A.S. *Adelaide*—which ship had relieved *Sydney* as the Western Australian force cruiser on 13th December, *Sydney* proceeding to Sydney for refit—and thence pursued her normal voyage to the United Kingdom, disembarking the two advanced parties at Port Said on 7th January 1940.

On 1st December 1939, the Commonwealth Government informed the British Government that it agreed that the first Australian contingent—the brigade mentioned above—should sail about 9th January 1940, whereupon the Director of Sea Transport requisitioned the necessary ships for the movement of the first Australian and the first New Zealand brigade groups totalling approximately 13,500 men.⁶ Eleven fast liners, seven of

⁵ The Transport Committee was under the chairmanship of ACNS, members being the Asst Dir of Engineering; two Naval Staff Officers; the Directors of Victualling and Stores; a Finance Branch representative; and the Transport Liaison Officer, who acted as Secretary. In Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle, the Senior Naval Officers were Naval Transport Officers whose staffs included a Sea Transport Officer to deal with detail.

⁶ Total Australians actually embarked was 6,571, including 21 naval.

them well-known in the United Kingdom-Australia or New Zealand trade, and the remainder diverted from other peacetime routes, were requisitioned to form the first Australia-New Zealand Convoy of the war, designated "US.1". The final allocation of ships to the convoy was: Australian transports *Empress of Japan* (U.1), *Orcades* (U.2), *Strathnaver* (U.3), *Otranto* (U.4), and *Orford* (U.5); New Zealand transports *Empress of Canada* (Z.1), *Dunera II* (Z.2), *Strathaird* (Z.3), *Orion* (Z.4), *Rangitata* (Z.5), and *Sobieski* (Z.6).⁷ The transports arrived at their embarkation ports—Wellington and Lyttelton in New Zealand and Sydney and Melbourne in Australia—during the last week in December and the first week in January. Little fitting out was necessary. In some ships it had already been done, and a review prepared by the Transport Committee at the time observed that "the fitting out was done in such a manner as to cause the least possible damage to, and dismantling of, ships' fittings. There was virtually no 'gutting' as there was in 1914-18." This was war-de-luxe. But these veterans-to-be never travelled again in such style. In US.1 few ships carried higher than 25 per cent more troops than their normal full passenger list, and in no case was the extra quota as high as 50 per cent. Extra accommodation was provided

by fitting additional berths in existing cabins (protecting panelling etc. by plywood where necessary), and by fitting hammock bunks in tween decks. The latter arrangement was subsequently altered to provide for berths in tween decks instead of hammocks. Ventilation was to be introduced by extending the punkah louver systems in adjoining sections. Additional life-rafts were to be supplied as requisite.

On the 12th November, before the appearance of a raider in the Indian Ocean, the Admiralty had informed the Naval Board that it was understood that the first contingent of Australian troops would be ready to move to Egypt about the 7th December, and proposed that the R.A.N. should escort the convoy as far as the longitude of Ceylon, whence onward escort would be provided by the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies. In a signal of the 24th November, the Naval Board concurred in this proposal, adding that the Commonwealth Government's approval had been sought, "but date first convoy's move still uncertain". On the 28th of the month the Admiralty told the Naval Board that if the convoy could sail from Sydney

⁷ The series of convoys carrying Aust and NZ troops overseas before Japan's entry into the war was designated, for secrecy and convenience, "US", and numbered chronologically. Thus the first convoy was "US.1".

Owners and tonnages of ships of US.1 were: Canadian Pacific Railway Co, *Empress of Japan* 26,032, *Empress of Canada* 21,517; Orient SN Co, *Orcades* 23,456, *Otranto* 20,026, *Orford* 20,043, *Orion* 23,371; P & O SN Co, *Strathnaver* 22,283, *Strathaird* 22,281; NZ Shipping Co, *Rangitata* 16,737; Brit India SN Co, *Dunera* 11,162; Gdynia-America Shipping Lines (Polish), *Sobieski* 11,030.

Although a number of vessels for the convoy were "taken up" in Australia, all actual requisitioning was done by the Director of Sea Transport. The hire of overseas vessels used for the transport of Australian troops was paid direct to the owners by the Imperial Govt, which also bore the expense of refitting and victualling. By an agreement of Nov 1942, after long negotiations between the respective Governments, troops were conveyed from Australia to the Middle East or in the reverse direction at a flat rate of £45 sterling a head, irrespective of rank, the rate applying to troops who were diverted to the UK and eventually transported to the ME. Transport from Australia to Malaya was charged for at £18 sterling a head. These rates, which were to be paid by the Aust Govt to the Imperial Govt, covered also the transport of military equipment and government stores carried in the same ships as the troops. When the rates were decided it was agreed that they should apply throughout the period of hostilities but be subject to review in the event of any major change. Under this *per capita* agreement the Commonwealth, up to 31 Aug 1943, incurred a liability of £10,377,603 10s sterling.

early in January they could make H.M.S. *Ramillies*—which, as stated above, was one of a raider hunting group in the Socotra area—available as a capital ship escort, and proposed that from south-west Australia to the longitude of Colombo, one Australian 6-inch gun cruiser should be additional escort. The signal added that “for reasons which have already been represented to the Australian Government and which are held equally to apply Indian Ocean and Red Sea at present time, no anti-submarine destroyer escort considered necessary”.

At this time, some days before the destruction of the *Graf Spee*, and when the Admiralty were not aware of the other two pocket battleships being in German home waters—it was still not clear whether more than one raider was operating in the Indian Ocean and South Atlantic, and still believed that at least two pocket battleships were at sea. There existed therefore the possibility of a repetition of the circumstances of 1914, when the first A.I.F. convoy passed within a few miles of the German cruiser *Emden* operating in the Indian Ocean, the raider being destroyed at Cocos Island by one of the convoy's escorting warships, the Australian cruiser *Sydney*. This possibility engaged attention both in England and in Australia. At the Admiralty the First Lord, Winston Churchill, addressed a minute to the First Sea Lord on the 30th November:

I should be glad if you would consider whether it is not possible to add a third vessel to the Australasian escorts. Perhaps the Australians will offer another of their cruisers, but if not, cannot we find another 6-inch gun ship with a catapult? This would leave *Ramillies* freer to engage the enemy, if an attack should be made by surface ships. It enables also scouting to be done far ahead and to the flanks of the convoy, thus giving ample warning. If such a cruiser could be found in China or in Indian waters, fitted with an asdic and depth charges, one would at least have some apparent answer to a U-boat. The transportation of the Australian divisions is an historic episode in Imperial history. An accident would be a disaster. Perhaps one of our detached submarines in the Indian Ocean could also help.

A few days later—though apparently without any knowledge of Churchill's suggestion—the Australian Naval Staff made similar proposals for the strengthening of the escort, and these were embodied in a memorandum which was addressed by Admiral Colvin to the Acting Minister for the Navy, and was considered at a War Cabinet meeting on the 7th December.

The Admiralty offer of a battleship (wrote Colvin) provides a powerful nucleus and their proposal that the escort should consist of one battleship and one six-inch cruiser provides a measure of protection which the Naval Board would be prepared to accept if it were not practicable to strengthen the escort, but it is the opinion of the Naval Staff that the public of Australia, whose interest in the war will be specially directed towards this force proceeding overseas, would justifiably expect the maximum protection possible to be provided.⁸

⁸ In regard to the above distinction between “Naval Board” and “Naval Staff” as stated in Chapter 1, the Naval Board was charged with the control and administration of all matters relating to the naval forces upon policy directed by the Minister, and had executive command of the naval forces; and the Governor-General could delegate to the Board the functions, and commission it to execute the office, of C-in-C Naval Forces. The Naval Staff were advisers to the Naval Board, and the First Naval Member had a dual role as a Member of the Board and as Chief of the Naval Staff. The President of the Board was the Minister for the Navy. In his absence, the First Naval Member was Chairman, but did not deputise as President. Individual members of the Board could give Board decisions in matters of routine within their own particular sphere, but in matters of policy, or where important decisions were to be made, these had to

Remarking that any loss in this first convoy of Australian troops would have the most unfortunate effect on public opinion, the Naval Staff expressed the opinion that while the escort force of one battleship and one 6-inch gun cruiser proposed by the Admiralty would be sufficient by day in good visibility, by night or in bad visibility the security would be considerably reduced. Under such conditions the battleship's low speed would prevent the force driving off or destroying a German pocket battleship or 8-inch gun cruiser. Some publicity would certainly be entailed in the concentrating of troops and ships, and their embarkation and sailing, and it must be assumed that the general movements of the convoy would be known to the enemy, who might be expected to make some special effort to obtain so rich a prize.⁹

The Naval Staff therefore considered that some additional protection should be provided, and proposed that the escort should be the battleship from Sydney to Aden, supplemented between Sydney and Fremantle with two 8-inch gun cruisers; between Fremantle and the limit of the Australia Station in the vicinity of Cocos Island with two 8-inch and one 6-inch gun cruisers; and from the vicinity of Cocos to Colombo with one 6-inch gun cruiser. The cruisers were to be the Australian ships *Canberra*, *Australia* and *Sydney*. This, it was suggested, would result in a desirable strengthening of the convoy's protection while passing through focal areas, but would not entail the 8-inch gun cruisers leaving the Australia Station. Beyond the limits of the station the convoy would be in the open spaces of the Indian Ocean, where the danger of attack would be less, and where the cover from strong East Indies forces would become increasingly effective.

It was recognised by the Naval Staff that the withdrawal of the three cruisers from Australian coastal waters would weaken trade protection temporarily, leaving it to one 6-inch gun cruiser—*Adelaide*—and two armed merchant cruisers "as they became available". As has been stated earlier, the War Cabinet had approved at its meeting of 6th October an Admiralty proposal that the Commonwealth should equip and man two armed merchant cruisers for the R.A.N. Two coastal passenger liners, *Manoora*¹ and *Westralia*² were requisitioned, but neither was yet effective. The first, *Manoora*, commissioned under Commander Spurgeon³ on 12th

be Board decisions approved by the Minister as President. If there was disagreement among members of the Board, the matter had to be referred to the Minister as President, with the pros and cons stated. There was apparently no disagreement among the Board on this particular matter, but it was referred to the Acting Minister because an important decision, raised by the advice of the Naval Staff, was called for. The Acting Minister in turn referred it to the War Cabinet because of its importance.

⁹ On 12 Dec a cable from its Manila correspondent to the Italian newspaper *Telegrafo* stated: "It is reported from Hong Kong that British ship *Empress of Canada* will shortly sail for Australian ports and subsequently convey Australian and New Zealand contingents to Canadian Pacific ports."

¹ HMAS *Manoora*, armed merchant cruiser (1935), 10,856 tons, Adelaide SS Co, requisitioned 14 Oct 1939, commissioned 12 Dec 1939, seven 6-in guns, 18 kts; converted to LSI 2 Feb 1943.

² HMAS *Westralia*, armed merchant cruiser (1929), 8,108 tons, Huddart Parker Ltd, requisitioned 2 Nov 1939, commissioned 17 Jan 1940, seven 6-in guns, 16 kts; converted to LSI 25 Jun 1943.

³ Capt A. H. Spurgeon, OBE; RAN. (HMS *Agincourt* 1918.) Comd HMAS *Manoora* 1939-42; CSO to NOIC Sydney 1942. Of Sydney; b. Gosport, Hants, Eng, 3 May 1900. Died 6 Dec 1942.

December 1939; the second, *Westralia*, under Commander Rosenthal,⁴ on 17th January 1940. Weighing all considerations, however, the Naval Staff were of the opinion that the risks to which Australian trade might be subjected could be accepted for the brief period the 8-inch gun cruisers would be with the convoy. At their farthest distance from Australia they would be within two days' high-speed steaming of the western focal area, and within five-and-a-half days' steaming of the main south-eastern focal area. Australian air force squadrons would be available to give assistance in the case of an enemy attacking close inshore, and the coastal batteries would afford full protection at defended ports. Furthermore, the Staff suggested that if necessary, in view of the importance of giving the fullest possible protection to the convoy, the stopping of all shipping for a short period, though it would cause some dislocation, would give complete protection to trade. And it strongly recommended the strengthening of the convoy escort by the methods it proposed, and sought the War Cabinet's approval to inform the Admiralty accordingly.

Neither the War Cabinet nor the Prime Minister, however, though agreeing with the desirability of increasing the convoy escort over that proposed by the Admiralty, approved the weakening of local forces even temporarily, and it was decided that the Prime Minister and Acting Navy Minister should confer personally on the matter with the Chief of the Naval Staff. In an interview on 11th December, Colvin personally explained the Naval Staff's proposals for the use of the Australian cruisers to augment the escort force, whereupon Mr Menzies⁵ informed him of his objections and those of the War Cabinet, and directed him to request the Admiralty to provide two 8-inch gun cruisers as additional escort from Fremantle onwards, so that the Australian cruisers should not leave coastal waters. The request was accordingly made, and met with the Admiralty's immediate agreement; and H.M.S. *Kent* and—with the approval of the French authorities—the French cruiser *Suffren* were directed to escort the convoy from Fremantle onwards.

In commenting on this in a minute to the Acting Minister on 15th December, Admiral Colvin remarked that the withdrawal of *Kent* and *Suffren* from other duties left "an important trade route temporarily unguarded"—they had formed a hunting group off Sumatra—and added:

The Prime Minister will be aware that I regretted the necessity for his decision though I recognise it was taken on political grounds which are outside my province, but since the decision has been taken the strategical situation has been altered and most agreeably improved by the successful action against the *Graf Spee*. According to the latest intelligence, the two other pocket battleships are in Home waters (where they were sighted by a submarine on 13th December) and the possibility of raiding cruisers being at large is much reduced. In these circumstances I would urge that the matter be now reconsidered and that my original proposal of our 8-inch cruisers

⁴ Capt A. S. Rosenthal, DSO, OBE; RAN. (HMS *Ramillies* 1919.) DNO, SA, 1937-39; comd HMAS *Westralia* 1940, HMAS *Nestor* 1941-42; NA Washington, USA, 1942-44; Capt Dockyard, Sydney, 1944-45. Of Melbourne; b. Sydney, 16 Jan 1901. (Son of Maj-Gen Sir Charles Rosenthal, GOC 2 Aust Div 1918.)

⁵ Rt Hon R. G. Menzies, CH, MLC, Vic, 1928-29; MLA, Vic, 1929-34; MHR since 1934. Attorney-General 1935-39; Treasurer 1939-40; Prime Minister and Min for Defence 1939-41; Prime Minister since 1949. B. Jeparit, Vic, 20 Dec 1894.

escorting the convoy to the limits of the Australia Station be agreed to, the R.N. cruisers taking over from this point. In connection with the convoy of New Zealand troops I have arranged for H.M.A.S. *Canberra*, wearing the flag of the R.A. Commanding H.M.A. Squadron, to join the escort from New Zealand to Australia.

The War Cabinet considered this recommendation at a meeting on 21st December, but decided that the Admiralty arrangement for two 8-inch gun cruisers to escort the convoy from Fremantle should be adopted. It was, however, approved that *Canberra* should join the escort from New Zealand to Australia, and, with this exception, no H.M.A. ship then on the Australia Station escorted convoy US.1 beyond the limits of Australian coastal waters.

This divergence of views between the Naval Staff and the Government was natural. On the one hand the Staff, though fully aware of the importance of the convoy, was concerned with its movement in the setting of the over-all naval scene; and while assessing the risks it would run on the successive stages of its route, was bound to visualise the effect in other areas of the withdrawal from them for escort purposes of naval forces whose dispositions had been planned in careful regard to the existing oceanic situation. The actual damage done to trade by the German raiders was comparatively small, but the dispersal of British naval strength in affording protection and hunting the raiders was very great. Writing subsequently of this period, Churchill said:

The search for two raiders entailed the formation of nine hunting-groups, comprising twenty-three powerful ships. We were also compelled to provide three battle-ships and two cruisers as additional escorts with the important North Atlantic convoys. These requirements represented a very severe drain on the resources of the Home and Mediterranean Fleets, from which it was necessary to withdraw twelve ships of the most powerful types, including three aircraft-carriers.⁶

Of this general situation the Naval Staff were aware, and were constrained to ensure that the provision of adequate protection for the convoy was not at the unwarranted expense of these wider naval interests. For the time being no raider threat appeared in the Pacific, but was very real in the Indian Ocean where, a short while earlier, the Australian 8-inch gun cruisers had been disposed temporarily as a counter; and the present proposal of the Staff was but an extension of this western disposition to the limits of the Australia Station during the progress thereto of the convoy, instead of in the proximity of Fremantle. It was a proposal which, in the circumstances, was reasonable and sound.

On the other hand, the immediate concern of the Government was with the safety of the convoy and the floating trade and ports of Australia; remembering that two of the modern 6-inch gun cruisers and all five destroyers of the small Australian Navy were already overseas—a fact which, naturally, was not publicly known—and were making a valuable contribution in this wider field. The Government, while as fully aware as Mr Churchill that any accident to the convoy would be a disaster of far-reaching consequence, was also conscious of its responsibility to ensure

⁶ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol I (1948), p. 403.

the maximum possible protection for Australia's coasts and floating trade, and hesitated to deplete the defences of either for the other if this could be avoided. Furthermore, in its refusal to take the risk of further depleting its naval forces in Australian waters, the Government was following the accepted Imperial policy that each Dominion must be responsible for its own local defence.

A somewhat similar situation had arisen in regard to the first Australia-New Zealand convoy of the 1914-18 war, when both the Commonwealth and New Zealand Governments—especially the latter—considered the proposed escort arrangements between New Zealand and the convoy assembly point in Western Australia were inadequate in view of the presence of von Spee's squadron in the Pacific. The problem then was resolved by the Admiralty's proposal to delay the embarkation of troops and departure of the ships from New Zealand and eastern Australian ports until suitable escorts could be provided. As the Naval Historian of that war wrote:

Whatever the Dominion Governments might have consented to do, if pressed, this telegram was received with grateful relief by those among the Ministers whose anxiety had been so deeply stirred.⁷

The same might be said of this later occasion, and of the Admiralty's immediate agreement to provide the two 8-inch gun cruisers as ocean escort for US.1.

Whatever Mr Menzies and his ministers might have done had the Admiralty been unable, or unduly embarrassed in attempting, to make R.N. cruisers available, it was their duty both to themselves and to Australia to at any rate raise the question before agreeing to the Naval Staff's original proposal. And, the problem having been satisfactorily solved from their point of view by the Admiralty's prompt action in providing cruisers, it was scarcely to be expected that they would agree to Admiral Colvin's proposal of 15th December to reopen the matter, particularly since the location of the German pocket battleships in Home waters presumably relieved the pressure on the Royal Navy in the Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile, while all these discussions had been in progress, the Admiralty had informed the Naval Board that *Ramillies* would proceed to New Zealand to escort the New Zealand contingent—due to leave the Dominion on 6th January 1940—to Australia, H.M.N.Z.S. *Leander* and H.M.A.S. *Canberra* completing the escort for that portion of the voyage. *Ramillies* would reach Fremantle on 20th December, Melbourne on the 25th, and Wellington on the last day of the year. Final escort arrangements for the convoy over the whole of its voyage to the Middle East were: Wellington to Sydney, *Ramillies*, *Canberra*, *Leander*; Sydney to Fremantle, *Ramillies*, *Canberra*, *Australia*; Fremantle to Colombo, *Ramillies*, *Kent*, *Suffren*; Colombo to Aden, *Ramillies*, the aircraft carrier *Eagle*, the cruisers *Sussex* and *Hobart*, and the destroyer *Westcott*,⁸ the destroyer being in-

⁷ A. W. Jose, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18*, Vol IX (1928), p. 155.

⁸ HMS *Westcott*, destroyer (1918), 1,100 tons, four 4-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 31 kts.

cluded to give anti-submarine protection, although such had not previously been considered necessary, consequent on reports of a submarine having been sighted in the Arabian Sea.⁹

It had been arranged that the Commonwealth would provide the Convoy Commodore and his staff, and New Zealand the Vice-Commodore, and the Naval Board appointed Captain Blackwood,¹⁰ who took up his duties in *Orion*, sailing in her from Sydney, where she had fitted out, on 30th December to her embarkation port, Wellington. Captain Caffyn,¹ Master of *Dunera II*, was appointed Vice-Commodore.

On 6th January 1940, the New Zealand transports *Orion*, *Empress of Canada*, *Strathaird* and *Rangitata*, escorted by *Ramillies* and *Canberra*, sailed from Wellington to rendezvous in Cook Strait with *Dunera II* and *Sobieski*, which had embarked their troops in Lyttelton and sailed from that port escorted by *Leander*, the convoy there formed up and set a course across the Tasman for a point thirty miles south of Sydney, there to rendezvous with the Australian contingent.

Sydney's citizens are familiar with the pageantry of the sea. From the Heads to the waterside centre at Woolloomooloo and Circular Quay, and beyond to the busy wharves lying above the bridge, the harbour is never lacking in movement and interest. Throughout the twenty-four hours some part of the procession of inward and outward-bound ships is passing over its waters; overseas liners, coastal vessels, colliers, freighters, tankers, their comings and goings are as a pulse whose beat is seldom noticed except when something occurs to quicken it. There was such a quickening on Wednesday, 10th January 1940. From dawn, R.A.A.F. aircraft from Richmond and Laverton roared over adjacent coastal waters on air searches and anti-submarine patrols as the New Zealand convoy approached the rendezvous, and their work continued throughout the day. In the early morning harbourside residents and sightseers watched an added pageantry to that of the everyday. At seven o'clock *Leander*, wearing the broad pendant of the Commodore Commanding the New Zealand Squadron, led *Ramillies* and *Empress of Canada* in through the Heads, the three ships having detached from the convoy during the night. Major-General Freyberg,² commanding the New Zealand brigade group, disembarked from *Empress of Canada*, and she sailed again at 9.30 a.m., escorted by

⁹ Churchill felt some concern about this, and on 31 Jan wrote to the First Sea Lord: "Pictures have been published in many newspapers of the Australian troops marching through Sydney, etc, before starting for the war. Thus the enemy must know that convoys will be approaching the entrance to the Red Sea and the neighbourhood of Socotra. Although there is no intelligence of any U-boat in the Indian Ocean, how can we be quite sure one has not made its way up from Madagascar, where there was a rumour, to the Red Sea, and been oiled from some Italian or Arabian port. I must say I should feel more comfortable if anti-submarine escort could be provided from the neighbourhood of Socotra. This could be done by sending the destroyer *Vendetta* from Haifa to rendezvous, say 200 miles east of Socotra, with the destroyer *Westcott*, which is already following up the convoy from Singapore. The presence of these two asdic-fitted destroyers would give complete assurance, and only one of them has to go far out of her way." This suggestion was not acted upon, however. Churchill, Vol I, p. 597.

¹⁰ Capt M. B. R. Blackwood, DSO; RN. (Q boat cdr 1914-18; HMAS *Sydney* 1919-21.) Comd Convoy US.1 1940. Of Maidenhead, Eng, and Turramurra, NSW; b. 22 Sep 1882. Died 26 Aug 1941.

¹ Capt F. Caffyn, OBE. Master of *Dunera II* until Sep 1943. Master mariner; of Elwell, Surrey, Eng; b. Cuckfield, Sussex, Eng, 5 Oct 1887.

² Lt-Gen Lord Freyberg, VC, GCMG, KCB, KBE, DSO. (Royal Naval Div in France and Gallipoli 1914-17, bde cdr France, 1917-18.) GOC 2 NZEF 1939-45. Governor-General of New Zealand 1946-52. B. Richmond, Surrey, Eng, 21 Mar 1889.

Australia, to rejoin the convoy. At 2.10 p.m. the four Sydney transports, *Orcades*, *Strathnaver*, *Otranto* and *Orford*, the Orient ships bright in their peacetime paint, and all splashed with the khaki of the cheering troops crowding their rails, moved down the harbour and sailed with *Ramillies* for the convoy rendezvous. *Canberra* made a brief entry into harbour for mails, and at four o'clock the Sydney ships joined the convoy which formed into three lines:

<i>Otranto</i> (U.4)	<i>Orion</i> (Z.4)	<i>Orcades</i> (U.2)
<i>Strathaird</i> (Z.3)	<i>Empress of Canada</i> (Z.1)	<i>Rangitata</i> (Z.5)
<i>Sobieski</i> (Z.6)	<i>Strathnaver</i> (U.3)	<i>Dunera II</i> (Z.2)
<i>Orford</i> (U.5)		

and proceeded on the first leg of the voyage to the Middle East. *Sydney*, which had joined the convoy at the rendezvous as additional escort, accompanied it as far as Jervis Bay, where she detached and entered that harbour before returning to Sydney; *Leander*, which had remained in Sydney, subsequently returned to New Zealand.

Air cover during daylight hours was given by aircraft based on Liverpool, Canberra, Laverton and Mount Gambier, until the convoy's western advance placed it out of range of machines operating from these aerodromes. Protection against mines was afforded by the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla which, consisting of the sloops *Yarra* and *Swan* and the auxiliary minesweepers *Doomba*³ and *Orara*,⁴ had been formed on 10th December. Previous to the departure of the convoy from Sydney, the two sloops carried out searching sweeps of Bass Strait and its approaches, and then proceeded to Fremantle to sweep the approaches before the convoy's arrival there. *Doomba* and *Orara* swept ahead of the convoy as it passed through the searched channel in the narrow waters off Wilson's Promontory at Australia's south-east corner on 11th January.

Shortly after noon on the 12th, when off Port Phillip Heads, the convoy was joined by the single Melbourne transport, *Empress of Japan*, which took station at the rear of the centre column astern of *Strathnaver*. The passage across the Bight was uneventful. Some 200 miles east-south-east of Albany, the convoy was met by aircraft of No. 14 Squadron R.A.A.F. temporarily based on that port, and from then on until its final departure from Australia, continuous air cover was provided during daylight hours. In the afternoon of 18th January the ships rounded Rottnest Island and steamed into Gage Roads, where *Ramillies* remained at anchor while the transports entered Fremantle Harbour to water and fuel. *Canberra* and *Australia* screened to seaward and *Swan* and *Yarra* carried out close patrol. Fuelling and watering were completed with expedition, and by 10 a.m. on Saturday, 20th January, all ships were at anchor in Gage Roads ready to sail. *Ramillies* and the first column weighed and proceeded at noon, followed by the other columns at intervals of one mile. By 3.30 p.m. the

³ HMAS *Doomba*, auxiliary minesweeper (1919), 750 tons, Doomba Shipping Co, commissioned 25 Sep 1939, one 4-inch gun, 15 kts.

⁴ HMAS *Orara*, auxiliary minesweeper (1907), 1,297 tons, North Coast SN Co, commissioned 9 Oct 1939, one 4-in gun, 15 kts.

ships had cleared the swept channel, cruising order was formed and speed increased to $13\frac{1}{2}$ knots, and a course set for Colombo. H.M.S. *Kent* and the French cruiser *Suffren*, which had reached Fremantle from Colombo on 17th January, now replaced *Canberra* and *Australia* as additional escorts to *Ramillies*, and the two Australian cruisers, which had been patrolling in the offing, passed through the convoy at 6 p.m., cheering farewells on their way back to Fremantle.

In order to place ships of similar class in adjacent positions to assist in station keeping, cruising order was rearranged for this stage of the voyage, and the three columns of the convoy were now:

<i>Strathaird</i> (Z.3)	<i>Orion</i> (Z.4)	<i>Empress of Japan</i> (U.1)
<i>Strathnaver</i> (U.3)	<i>Orford</i> (U.5)	<i>Empress of Canada</i> (Z.1)
<i>Otranto</i> (U.4)	<i>Dunera II</i> (Z.2)	<i>Orcades</i> (U.2)
<i>Sobieski</i> (Z.6)		<i>Rangitata</i> (Z.5)

and this order was maintained until the convoy split into two groups at Aden.

The escorting warships were disposed ahead of the convoy during daylight, *Ramillies* being two miles ahead of *Orion*, with the two cruisers out on the wings, ten miles to port and starboard of the battleship. By night the escort closed in, with *Ramillies* and one cruiser each a mile ahead of the wing columns, and the other cruiser a mile astern of the convoy.

The voyage was made without serious incident and in fine weather. There was some excitement the first day out from Fremantle, when a man fell overboard from *Dunera*. He was smartly recovered by *Rangitata* but lost the convoy one hour of steaming time. By day the ships, bright on a blue sea and with intermittent patches of colour soaring to their signal yards as flag hoists fluttered messages, wheeled at intervals in practice zigzags and emergency turns. There were occasions when gunfire muttered—the escorting warships carrying out practice shoots. At the request of the senior military officers *Ramillies* passed down the lines of the convoy occasionally to let the troops see a battleship at close quarters, a proceeding evoking considerable enthusiasm. By night all ships were darkened, and became black masses against the silver of a sea lit by a full moon.

The convoy reached Colombo on 30th January, and remained in harbour there fuelling and watering until 1st February, when it sailed for Aden with the addition of the French transport *Athos II* (15,276 tons), which took station astern of *Dunera*. *Kent* and *Suffren* were relieved at Colombo by H.M.S. *Sussex*, wearing the flag of Rear-Admiral, 4th Cruiser Squadron—Rear-Admiral Murray,⁶ who now became Senior Officer, Escort—H.M.A.S. *Hobart*, and the aircraft carrier *Eagle*. The escort vessels took station in daylight with *Ramillies* two miles ahead of the convoy, normally on the lee bow; *Eagle* ahead or on the lee bow; *Sussex* five miles on the weather bow; and *Hobart* astern; closing in on the transports at night. Each afternoon *Eagle* put out a four-aircraft search covering 110 miles

⁶ Admiral A. J. L. Murray, CB, DSO, OBE; RN. (1914-18: HMS *Agamemnon*, Channel Fleet and Dardanelles.) Rear-Adm Fifth and Fourth Cruiser Sqns 1939-40; SNO Red Sea 1940-41. Of Horndean, Hants, Eng; b. 25 Nov 1886.

ahead and astern of the line of advance. The destroyer *Westcott* joined the escort for anti-submarine protection when the convoy was off Socotra.

Again the passage was made without serious incident. On 4th February one of *Eagle's* aircraft crashed in the sea, its crew of three being recovered safely by *Sussex*. The weather was fine; the convoy exercised in formation manoeuvres and zigzags; there was a burial, a crew member of *Empress of Canada*.

Aden was reached on the morning of 8th February; a morning of farewells, for here the convoy split into two groups, and *Ramillies*—not proceeding beyond Aden—passed down the line of ships with her band playing and ensign dipping as each ship cheered her in turn. Group Two of transports, comprising *Orion*, *Empress of Japan*, *Strathnaver*, *Rangitata* and *Orcades*, entered Aden to fuel and water. Group One, comprising the remainder of the transports, proceeded on the Red Sea passage escorted by *Hobart*, the French *Athos II* breaking off during the morning for Jibuti. At 8 a.m. on the 9th, Group Two sailed from Aden and, escorted by *Sussex* and *Westcott*—*Eagle* having remained at Aden after completing an air search outside the port—proceeded for Suez, entering the Red Sea with a strong following southerly at 6 p.m. The next afternoon *Sussex* said “good-bye”, steaming along the line and cheering; *Hobart*, who had left Group One at 22 degrees 30 minutes north, just abreast of Egypt's southern border, and returned to pick up Group Two, relieving the British cruiser at midnight. At eleven the following morning *Rangitata*, whose speed was limited to 15 knots, was left behind with *Westcott* as escort, and the remaining ships of Group Two increased to 18 knots. *Hobart* escorted them to 22 degrees 30 minutes north, where she made her farewells and left, the unescorted ships, “in company and correct”, continuing on through a clear night. Early in the afternoon of 12th February the ships entered the Gulf of Suez, and at 10.30 that night steamed into Suez Bay and anchored. The voyage was safely over.

The maximum speed of the convoy over its entire voyage to Aden was 13½ knots, although of the eleven ships comprising it, nine were 18-knot vessels. It was the familiar experience of the speed of a convoy having to be adjusted to that of the slowest ship—in this instance *Dunera II* which, the only vessel in the convoy specially designed as a troop transport, was nominally of 17 knots but actually had a full speed of 14½, further reduced by a foul bottom. *Rangitata* was next slowest at 15 knots. On this matter each senior officer of ocean escort made pertinent comments in his report of the voyage. Captain Baillie-Grohman,⁶ Commanding Officer of *Ramillies*, remarked that:

It is of interest to note that the inclusion of *Dunera* thus caused, for the whole trip, a delay of five days for a total of 218,000 tons gross of shipping, assuming the convoy could have steamed at a speed of 15 knots.

More pointed criticism came from Rear-Admiral Murray when he wrote:

⁶ Vice-Adm H. T. Baillie-Grohman, CB, DSO, OBE; RN. (1914-18: in Dover Patrol.) ACNS Navy Office, Melbourne, 1925-27; comd HMS *Ramillies* 1939-40; Flag Offr attchd GHQ ME (i/c arrangements ashore during embarkation from Greece), 1941; Rear-Adm Combined Ops 1942. Of Chichester, Eng; b. Victoria, B.C., 15 Jan 1888.

Freedom from attack of this convoy, valuable as it is in tonnage, lives and prestige, has been cramped because H.M. Transports have not in the past been equipped with a reasonable turn of speed.

The problem was one which had manifested itself, to the irritation of the masters of fast merchant ships and the anxiety of the commanding officers of escorts, ever since convoys had existed. At the best, failure to solve it resulted in much waste of time and tonnage and increased hazard; it could, and on occasion did, result in the loss of ships and lives.

It should not have been permitted to arise—at any rate to the extent of a discrepancy of nearly 5 knots—in the case of an important troop convoy such as this. *Dunera II*, completed in 1937, was younger than the majority of the 18-knot passenger liners whose speed she so drastically reduced, but was apparently designed for economy in peacetime trooping, a poor substitute for wartime needs. It can only be assumed that her inclusion—and that of the 15-knot *Rangitata*—in US.1 was made unavoidable by the lack of any possible substitutes.

From Suez Bay the ships eventually proceeded to their disembarkation berths, the New Zealand section at Suez, the Australians at El Kantara; and at 5.30 in the evening of Monday, 12th February, the Australian Prime Minister issued a press statement that the troops of the Second A.I.F. had “begun to arrive in the Middle East and were proceeding to their specified stations”.

VII

This news release was the first during the war through which became apparent the difficulties of arranging uniform censorship and the publication of information to meet—or so far as the enemy was concerned to deny—the requirements of widely-separated but closely-interested authorities; in this instance the British, Australian, and New Zealand Governments, their naval and military commanders at home and in the Middle East, and the enemy intelligence sections.

From the strategical viewpoint the ideal would have been that complete secrecy should cloak this major troop movement over great distances to what both history and the existing situation indicated would become a major theatre of war. But this was obviously an impracticable condition. The presence of transports and escort vessels in Australian and New Zealand ports, and the embarkation of troops and departure of the convoy, would become widely known throughout the two countries, whose peoples, concerned for the welfare of their men, were entitled to whatever information could be given them. Their respective governments owed it to them to see that reliable information was provided, and furthermore to themselves be the first to provide official news. Rumour, if nothing more, would get out of Australia and New Zealand through neutral and other channels. There remained the problem of concealing so far as possible individual items of information of intelligence value to the enemy. The British Government, “upon whom”, as Admiral Colvin later commented, “falls primarily the responsibility for the safe conduct of this and future convoys”, while closely concerned with the need for secrecy, particularly regarding

the disposition of naval forces, was aware of the responsibilities of the Dominion Governments to their peoples. In arranging censorship and publicity, efforts were made by all concerned to reconcile the opposing factors.

During the years between the wars, wartime censorship under the two main divisions of Communications (Telegraph and Postal) and Publicity (Press, Broadcasting and Films) had been discussed between the various governments of the Empire, among whom there had been periodical issues of censorship regulations. Questions of policy had been referred to the Standing Inter-Departmental Committee of Imperial Defence, the War Office being responsible in practice for advising on matters of censorship detail arising in connection with all categories of membership in the Empire outside Great Britain. Thus there had been arranged a general coordination of censorship which—according to the *British Censorship Rules and Regulations, 1938*, on which Australian censorship was based—aimed at excluding from publication or communication in any form information bearing on the strength and disposition of British or Allied fighting forces; merchant shipping and commercial aircraft; matter calculated to lower British or raise enemy morale; and information regarding the production of material of war; and at the same time to collect information of value from communications and publications subject to censorship.

Before the war, the British Government had decided, in the event of hostilities, to create a Ministry of Information with the main object of presenting the national case to the public at home and abroad, its duties to include not only the issue of propaganda and information, but also such control of news as was demanded by national security. In this matter of control of news of naval, military or air operations, the decision of the authorities responsible for the direction of the war or foreign policy was to be accepted by the censorship authorities. This Ministry of Information was established on 3rd September 1939.

In Australia in the early weeks of the war, the Department of the Army was responsible for both communications and publicity censorship, which was administered by the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence. Within the navy, censorship was the immediate concern of the Director of Naval Intelligence, who, himself directly responsible to the Chief of the Naval Staff, referred to the Chief Censor of the Department of the Army such naval censorship restrictions as it was desired should be imposed. Naval liaison officers were appointed to work with the army censors and watch naval interests. But on 7th September Mr Menzies announced the Government's decision to establish a Department of Information, and this department was soon set up, with Sir Henry Gullett as Minister for Information, and Major J. L. Treloar (of the Australian War Memorial) as Director. Control of the censorship of the Press, broadcasting and films was transferred from the Department of the Army to the Department of Information, and Mr P. B. Jenkin, a senior journalist, was appointed Chief Publicity Censor. Control of communications censorship remained with the Department of the Army. The Department of Information was to have the final decision on publicity censorship, and the navy,

army and air force were to appoint liaison officers to the department. In practice, the acceptance by the Department of Information of Service decisions in the censoring of naval, military or air news items, was followed.

In December 1939 it became clear that preparations for the formation and sailing of the convoy could not be kept secret, and Admiral Colvin proposed a Government statement, which was issued by the Acting Minister for the Navy on the 10th of the month:

The first contingent of the Second A.I.F. will leave shortly for service overseas. The public will appreciate that in the interests of the safety of the convoy it is not desirable to publish the date of sailing or any details of ships or movements. All can rest assured however that full protection for transports on the passage overseas will be provided. By cooperation between the R.N. and the R.A.N. powerful naval forces will be available to ensure their safety.

On the 5th December the navy had requested the Department of Information to issue a censorship instruction prohibiting absolutely any reference or speculation as to probable dates of departure of the convoy. This was followed by two amplifying instructions on the 13th and 18th December, detailing references which were prohibited in descriptions of the convoy and escorts. On the 5th January 1940, a censorship conference, attended by the Director of Information and representatives of the Services, was held at Defence headquarters, Melbourne, and it was agreed that all photographs and films of the convoy should be forwarded by the Department of Information to Army headquarters, where they would be classified by a Photographic Committee composed of representatives of the Services. This committee was formed, and met as necessary to carry out its work.

Meanwhile there had been some leakage in New Zealand, where newspaper publication revealed the presence there of *Ramillies*; and on 12th January the Naval Board signalled to the New Zealand Naval Board the Australian intention not to publish information regarding the convoy until it had passed Aden, when it was proposed to release a statement concerning movements as far as Fremantle, with a further release covering the remainder of the voyage after the convoy's arrival at its destination, adding: "Understand New Zealand papers reveal presence H.M.S. *Ramillies* and publish speech by R.A.C.A.S.⁷ entitled 'Transports Ready'."

Before the New Zealand Naval Board could express its views on Australian intentions, a signal of 13th January from the Admiralty told both naval boards that publication of any news of the convoy should be withheld until disembarkation, and the importance of this was stressed in a further Admiralty signal of 18th January. On the 26th of the month, when the convoy was still between Fremantle and Colombo, the Naval Board signalled the Admiralty asking, "to ensure uniformity of release", the extent to which the Admiralty would agree to publication of names of escorts, types of escort vessels, the cooperation of the French Navy, the ships in the convoy, and ports of embarkation, call, and disembarkation. The Admiralty's reply, dated 3rd February and received at Navy Office on the 4th—when the convoy was midway between Colombo and Aden—

⁷ Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron.

was that none of the above should be published with the exception of the cooperation of the French Navy and the ports of embarkation (when it was obvious that they were widely known) and disembarkation: "the principal reason for secrecy regarding this move is that similar movements take place again shortly."

This Admiralty signal—which went also direct to the New Zealand Naval Board—was at once placed before the Melbourne Photographic Committee, who considered it in no way added to restrictions already in force in Australia. No immediate action was therefore taken in regard to it, but on 5th February the Director of Naval Intelligence decided to cover all previous naval censorship instructions with one general instruction based on the Admiralty's signal, and to issue it to all authorities in order that action taken should be uniform throughout Australia. This was done, and in addition the Admiralty signal itself was on the 7th of the month communicated to the Department of Defence Coordination who transmitted it to the Prime Minister's Department on the same day, and on 8th February—the day the convoy reached Aden—it was sent from Naval Intelligence to the Department of Information by letter, being received by them on the 9th. As a result of the receipt of the letter, the Minister for Information telephoned his navy colleague to say that time would not permit the sending of photographs and script from Sydney to Melbourne for censorship by the Melbourne Photographic Committee, and instructions were issued for the formation of a similar committee in Sydney.

While these signals were being exchanged between the two naval boards and the Admiralty, parallel communications were passing between Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain through government channels, and on 10th February there was received at Navy Office a copy of a Dominions Office telegram addressed to the Governor-General of New Zealand on the subject of censorship, amplifying but not materially altering the instructions already issued by the Naval Board. However, in a further effort to ensure uniformity of treatment, the Naval Board on Sunday, 11th February—the day before the convoy reached Suez—issued a final censorship instruction reading:

Photographs of individual transports alongside or at anchor are permitted but no names revealed. No photographs of convoy at sea permitted and any already authorised to be withdrawn. No information revealing size, composition, names, formation of convoy permitted. It is important that the exact speed of the convoy should not be capable of being deduced from information released.

By this time the newspapers had their pages prepared for publication of permitted stories and photographs of the convoy as soon as the official release took place, and this new censorship instruction called for a hurried review of all previously authorised material. In Melbourne, where the Photographic Committee had been operating for some time, this was managed without delay; but in Sydney the newly-appointed committee could not be called together before Monday the 12th February—the day of the official release—and the necessary review was therefore almost

on the papers' "deadline". The Sydney committee met at 2 p.m., and the work of censoring occupied one hour, only three lines of text and one photograph being deleted. The official release of the news of the safe arrival of the convoy was made by Mr Menzies at 5.30 p.m.

As earlier stated, the Australian Prime Minister's press release of the convoy's arrival was confined as to fact to the statement that the Australian troops had "begun to arrive in the Middle East and were proceeding to their specified stations". The wording had been arranged by consultation between the three Governments, and contained no reference to actual point of arrival, nor to the fact that the British Foreign Secretary, Mr Eden,⁸ was in Egypt and had met the troops on their arrival. The timing of releases had also been carefully arranged, allowing the Australian and New Zealand Governments a brief start which would enable them to be the first with what was to be a uniform statement.

On the night of 12th February, however, a New Zealand announcement broadcast by the Dominion's Deputy Premier, Mr Fraser,⁹ stated that the convoy consisted of ships of the British, Australian, and New Zealand navies, and specifically named three ships; and about four hours after Mr Menzies' announcement, a British Broadcasting Corporation short-wave broadcast—repeated at intervals during the evening—said that the Australian troops had arrived at Suez, and London press messages received in Australia told of Mr Eden's presence in Egypt.

A message of 13th February from Mr Menzies to the High Commissioner in London, Mr Bruce, referring to the New Zealand statement and asking if similar details could be published in Australia, brought a reply the following day that the Admiralty were most anxious that the names of escorting warships should be kept secret, and referred to the Admiralty's signal of 3rd February to the Naval Board in reply to the Naval Board's request for advice as to the extent information regarding the convoy should be published.

By this time sharp feeling was being expressed by some Australian newspapers—notably the *Sydney Morning Herald*—and by individuals, over the "confusion, muddle and delay" of the convoy censorship. The question was raised by the Minister for Information at a War Cabinet meeting on 14th February, the Prime Minister stating that it appeared to divide into two main heads: restrictions placed by the United Kingdom, though observed in Australia, had not been observed in the United Kingdom; action taken in Australia in recalling photographs after having previously released them for publication; and further delay in Sydney in releasing photographs and text to the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Monday, 12th February. It was decided that Mr Menzies should cable to Mr Bruce in London on the subject as it affected the United Kingdom authorities. In a telegram of 15th February, Mr Menzies spoke forcibly of the great

⁸ Rt Hon Sir Anthony Eden, KG, MC. (1914-18: Capt KRRC.) Sec for Foreign Affrs 1935-38, 1940-45, 1951-55, for Dominion Affrs 1939-40, for War 1940; Dep Prime Minister 1951-55; Prime Minister 1955-57. B. 12 Jun 1897.

⁹ Rt Hon P. Fraser, CH, Prime Minister of NZ 1940-49. B. Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland, 28 Aug 1884. Died 12 Dec 1950.

embarrassment caused him by the absence of highly relevant facts in his statement, since revealed from overseas. On the naval side he expressed strongest exception to refusal to allow reference to a battleship as part of the escort, as publication of the presence of a battleship in these waters of considerable value in assuring the public, conveying a sense of security, and stimulating recruiting. Also this fact broadcast from New Zealand.

He went on to say:

Recently some important messages, particularly one affecting censorship, were sent from Admiralty to the Australian Naval Board. Essential to make clear that messages from Admiralty to Naval Board are not to be employed as channel for inter-Governmental communications to Australian Government. Appreciate your strongest representations these points, which live issue here and inference being drawn some quarters Government submitting external dictation on matters preeminently Australian concern.

In a reply of 17th February the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs stated that the general principles the British naval and military authorities regarded as governing views on censorship policy required troop and convoy movements to deny, or at least delay as long as possible, authentic information which was likely to be of military assistance to the enemy, and that a distinction was drawn between an official announcement and a report whose accuracy the enemy would have no means of verifying.

Hence in this particular case an endeavour was made to avoid official announcement on the composition of the convoy and escort, the state of preparedness of the forces, the exact location. Known precise strength, preparedness allied troops Middle East matter of concern German or even Russian High Command; important therefore deny this information regarding what a substantial part of total allied forces available that area.

On the purely naval side:

General rule concealment disposition particular naval forces prevent enemy drawing deductions disposition forces generally. Reference composition escort would help enemy assess composition escorts future occasions and give them time prepare plans.

As to the Admiralty-Naval Board communication channel:

Never been any intention using channel communication between Admiralty and Australian Commonwealth Naval Board as substitute for inter-Governmental communications. The fact my telegram of 6th February [a telegram to Governor-General New Zealand, repeated to Prime Minister, Australia, suggesting form of communiqué and time of release] referred to correspondence between Admiralty and Naval Board which arose out of specific enquiry from latter due desire save time and expense.

Meanwhile the views of various authorities had been published in the newspapers, the *Sydney Morning Herald* quoting a statement by Mr Menzies in which he said:

The War Cabinet had before it such of the facts of the situation as were available. We were all satisfied that some people had behaved with a high degree of stupidity and had thereby caused unnecessary inconvenience to the press and prevented reasonable satisfaction being given to the public.

The Sydney Morning Herald commented that

unofficially but authoritatively, it is stated, the "people" to whom Mr Menzies referred were members of the defence services, who, it is declared, interfered at the last moment with the Department of Information's censorship arrangements.

And the Minister for Information was reported as informing the State Advisory Council:

I am responsible for publication censorship, but I should be ashamed to come here and admit that I or the Department of Information had been in any degree responsible for the mess that has taken place in the last weekend.

That there had been confusion cannot be denied. To an extent it arose from the over-anxiety of Australian naval intelligence, first to ensure that as much as was compatible with naval security should be released, second to ensure that there should be uniformity of censorship of naval items in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. And the greater share of the blame for the "muddle" was laid at the navy's door. But the greater contribution to confusion was made by factors beyond either Australian or British control—the New Zealand broadcast, and the impracticability of controlling news releases from Egypt and Palestine, which disclosed such information as the immediate destination of the Australian troops in the Middle East; though they did not make any naval disclosures since none of the escort vessels went to Egypt.

The Australian inference, stressed by Mr Menzies in his telegram to Bruce of 15th February, that the Australian Government was submitting to external dictation on matters preeminently an Australian concern, could not be upheld. Censorship in this instance was not preeminently an Australian concern. It was preeminently the concern of the British Government and the Admiralty. Theirs was the task of protecting the convoy and the Australian and New Zealand troops it carried. Theirs were the ships entrusted with that task. And this convoy, important as it was, was but one in the great stream of military and commercial traffic which the British Navy had to guard on the world's oceans. With but fifteen capital ships, a number of which were engaged in similar protective duties while others had to be held to contain powerful German units in home waters, the Admiralty had to do all it could to prevent intelligence from reaching the enemy.

Admiral Colvin, by his official position denied the public utterances afforded to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Information, made this point in a memorandum on the whole subject to the Acting Minister for the Navy on 16th February, when he wrote:

It was clear that the British Government, upon whom falls primarily the responsibility for the safe conduct of this and future convoys, considered that such restrictions were essential, and the Chief of the Naval Staff considered it necessary to ensure that there was no material divergence therefrom. . . . All action taken has been, in the opinion of the Chief of the Naval Staff, fully justified. . . . It is not always appreciated that items of information apparently harmless by themselves may be, and are, pieced together by the enemy to complete a picture of the greatest value to them. This is a fundamental truth in the technique of intelligence borne out by long experience, but one which those not concerned with it find it hard to realise.

That it was not realised by the *Sydney Morning Herald* was made evident by that paper in its leading article of 14th February 1940 when, under the heading "Releasing the News", it said:

In the case of the Second A.I.F. the need for secrecy concerning the movements of the convoy can be conceded—though, in fact, all Sydney knew when the transports left and how they were escorted, and it was clearly impossible, in these days of wireless and aeroplanes, to prevent the outside world from learning, too.

In his memorandum to the Acting Minister, Admiral Colvin went on to say, regarding the delay in passing on to other authorities the Admiralty signal of 3rd February, that this message should have been communicated to the Department of Information not later than 6th February, and there was no valid excuse for the delay

for which I accept full responsibility. It can, however, be said that there was no substantial difference between the restrictions previously in force and those now intended.

The upshot of the matter was that the Cabinet reaffirmed the responsibility of the Department of Information for publicity censorship—including photographs and films intended for publication, and incoming Press cables. It was agreed that the rules of censorship should be agreed upon by the Minister for Information and the Service Ministers, that the relation of the Services to the Chief Publicity Censor should be that of advisers only, any requests for prohibitions made by them should be accompanied by reasons and the appropriate National Security Regulation, and publicity mediums should be reminded that the publicity censor was the sole authority in that field.

So far as the navy was concerned the change was largely theoretical. Since the establishment of the Department of Information, Naval Board requests for prohibitions had been made through that department, and this practice continued, no difficulty being experienced in convincing publicity censors of the reasonableness of requests made from time to time. The change did not eliminate the likelihood of future difficulties, for it did not touch the main factors contributing to their occurrence on this and subsequent occasions of the release of news at widely separated points outside Australia: the time factor; the neutral press; and both Allied and enemy propaganda; among other things.¹ But in their mutual relations neither Navy nor Department of Information within Australia met with other than easily adjusted differences. The publicity censors appreciated the navy's need for secrecy where it was sought, and naval censorship in the main worked well. It was from sources beyond the control either of publicity censorship or the navy that breaches of security, when they arose, in most part came.

The new arrangement, in effect carrying on the practice hitherto obtaining, continued without either Government or Navy "submitting external

¹ As one instance, when the transport *Queen Mary* was lying in Sydney Harbour for all there to see, and a censorship regulation expressly forbade any mention of her, a senior official of the Department of Information, dining at a home overlooking the harbour and the large liner, was defending to his hosts the accuracy of the BBC news. In the middle of the discussion the BBC news came over the radio, one item of information divulged by the announcer being: "The giant liner *Queen Mary* arrived at Cape Town today."

dictation on matters preeminently Australian concern" until 1942 when, as will be seen later in this volume, the Government of the day handed over complete control of publicity censorship as it affected the operations of the Australian navy, army and air force, to the United States Commanding General South-West Pacific, General Douglas MacArthur.²

VIII

Convoy US.1 was the first of a series the formation and sailing of which was to become part of the routine work of the Naval Staff and Transport Committee, and four days after its arrival at Suez the Admiralty informed the Naval Board of their intention to employ the Atlantic liners *Queen Mary* and *Mauretania* as transports in US.2 and subsequent convoys. This was a wise decision, using the ships in waters where there was little danger of submarine attack, while their high speed with suitable escort made them practically immune from any surface raider. The high speed of these ships, however, and the difficulty of concentrating enough vessels similarly equipped to keep them company without slowing them to an unacceptable degree, led to the decision to split the proposed convoy into two groups—a slow group, US.2, and a fast, US.3—both to proceed to the Middle East. By the middle of March the general plan for the two convoys had been completed. US.2 was to comprise the transports *Etrick*, *Neuralia*, *Nevasa*, and two from US.1, *Strathaird* and *Dunera*; all five ships to carry Australian troops. The transports making up US.3 were to be *Queen Mary*, *Mauretania*, *Empress of Britain*, *Empress of Canada*, *Empress of Japan*, *Aquitania* and *Andes*;³ these ships to carry both Australian and New Zealand troops.

While these arrangements were being made, happenings were shaping which were to have important repercussions, not only upon the plans for the two convoys, but on the dispositions of ships of the R.A.N. on the Australia Station and overseas. On the arrival of *Australia* and *Canberra* at Fremantle with Convoy US.1 in January, *Adelaide*, which had been based on that port since relieving *Sydney* as Western Force cruiser on 13th December, sailed for Sydney for a dockyard refit. After the departure of US.1 from Fremantle, *Canberra* sailed from the west for eastern Australia on 30th January. *Australia* remained in the west until the 6th February when, *Sydney* arriving to resume duties as Western Force cruiser, she also sailed for the east. Throughout February and March these dispositions remained, *Canberra*, *Australia* and *Adelaide* in eastern Australian waters, where also were the newly commissioned armed merchant cruisers *Westralia* and *Manoora*, and *Swan* and *Yarra* with the other two ships of the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla. *Sydney*, throughout this period, was Western Force cruiser at Fremantle. Since the outbreak of hostilities fourteen

² General of Army D. MacArthur. C of S US Army 1930-35; CG US Army Forces in Far East 1941-42; C-in-C SWPA 1942-45; Supreme Cdr Allied Powers in Japan 1945-51. B. 26 Jan 1880.

³ Owners and tonnages of these ships not previously mentioned were: Brit India SN Co, *Neuralia* 9,182, *Nevasa* 9,213; Canadian Pacific Rly Co, *Empress of Britain* 42,348; Cunard White Star Line, *Aquitania* 44,786, *Mauretania* 35,739, *Queen Mary* 81,235; P & O SN Co, *Etrick* 11,279; Royal Mail Lines, *Andes* 25,689.

ships—trawlers and small coasters—had been requisitioned and equipped as auxiliary minesweepers, and by the 5th February these were all in commission, two of them, *Doomba* and *Orara*, with the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla, and the remainder forming the nucleus of five minesweeping groups, Group 50 based on Sydney; Group 54 on Melbourne; Group 66 on Fremantle; Group 74 on Brisbane; and Group 77 on Newcastle, New South Wales.⁴ Minesweeping training exercises were carried out by these groups, individually and in conjunction with the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla. The first actual sweeping operation on the Australian coast during the war was carried out between 10th and 13th October 1939, when *Swan* and *Yarra* swept an area off Gabo Island, following a report from there that a strange warship had been sighted ten miles to sea at 5 o'clock on the morning of the 10th. An air search, and investigations by *Canberra*, *Australia* and *Adelaide*, failed to find any vessel, and the sweep was fruitless.

By a signal of 23rd December 1939, the Admiralty had told the Naval Board that it was intended to replace H.M.A.S. *Perth* on the West Indies Station with a "D" class cruiser, *Perth* to proceed to the East Indies Station. The Naval Board, replying on the 4th January 1940, said that it was desired that *Perth* and *Sydney* exchange stations. "Propose for consideration in view economy steaming *Perth* proceeds Sydney via Panama. Date of arrival *Sydney* in East Indies to be not later than if *Perth* had proceeded via Suez." This proposal met with the agreement of the Admiralty, who on the 26th January signalled to the authorities concerned that *Sydney* would replace *Perth* in Imperial dispositions from 1st April, and would join the East Indies Station. *Perth* accordingly sailed for Australia as soon as arrangements could be made for her relief in the West Indies, departing from Panama on the 3rd March, and reaching Papeete on the 17th, Suva on the 25th, and Sydney on the 31st March.

*Colombo*⁵ and *Ceres*,⁶ the two "C" class cruisers which the Admiralty had allocated to the Australia Station in place of the five Australian destroyers, were by March on the way to Australia via Singapore; and on the 8th of the month *Ramillies*, returning from escorting US.1 to escort US.2, arrived at Fremantle. There had been no indication of enemy activity in the Pacific Ocean or Australian waters—where, with existing naval forces and those due to arrive the situation was well insured—and during March an Admiralty instruction authorised British merchant ships in Pacific areas to relax the "black-out" of war, and to burn dimmed navigation lights. A similar instruction was issued by the Naval Board to ships on the Australia Station, where it was decided also to introduce a modified routing system.

⁴ At this stage (Feb-Jun 1940) these Groups were: Group 50, HMA Ships *Tongkol* (292 tons) 4 Oct 1939; *Gooligwai* (271), 6 Oct 1939; *Coolebar* (479), 18 Dec 1939; *Nambucca* (489), 10 Jan 1940; Group 54, *Beryl II* (248), 9 Oct 1939; *Goorangai* (223), 9 Oct 1939; Group 66, *Korowa* (324), 6 Oct 1939; *Olive Cam* (281), 6 Oct 1939; *Bonthorpe* (273), 5 Feb 1940; Group 74, *Tambar* (456), 7 Nov 1939; Group 77, *Bermagui* (402), 11 Dec 1939; *Uki* (545), 11 Dec 1939. The dates are those of ships commissioning.

⁵ HMS *Colombo*, cruiser (1918), 4,200 tons, eight 4-in AA guns, 29 kts.

⁶ HMS *Ceres*, cruiser (1917), 4,290 tons, five 6-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 29 kts.

During this month, however, indications of possible enemy activity near the Australia Station became apparent. On the 12th, Australian Naval Intelligence received a report from Singapore that the German merchant ships in the Netherlands East Indies appeared to be preparing for concerted departures towards the end of March; and on the 24th an Admiralty signal reported that only one pocket battleship was located in German waters, and that the possibility of a raider being abroad could not be disregarded, information having been received that a pocket battleship, accompanied by a supply ship, had left Germany during the first week in March. It is now known that this information was not correct. *Scheer* was undergoing a long refit, and *Deutschland*—renamed *Liützow*—was being held for the Norwegian campaign in the following month.

In an appreciation of the situation which he made on the 30th March, however, the Director of Naval Intelligence, Melbourne, Commander Long, considered a pocket battleship's appearance in the Indian Ocean in connection with the reported sailing preparations of the German ships in the Netherlands East Indies as a possibility. Evidence reaching Navy Office that these preparations were genuine was too strong to discount. Nineteen ships⁷ were involved, loaded with goods urgently required by Germany; and the extent and cost of the preparations made—the loading and bunkering of the ships, and the creation of credits for the lifting of restraint—appeared to preclude the possibility of a bluff merely designed to keep the British forces occupied. Seeing the problem as nearly as he could from the German viewpoint, Long considered a concerted break might well be made to coincide with the sailing of convoy US.2 from Australia, and the consequent effect upon the dispositions of the Australian Squadron and of British forces in the Indian Ocean; while the simultaneous appearance of a pocket battleship in the Indian Ocean would afford cover for dispersed escape by further influencing those dispositions and diverting attention from the Netherlands East Indies. Taking all factors into consideration—the number of German ships involved, the urgency of Germany's need for their cargoes, and the possibility of influencing British dispositions favourably for the project—it seemed to him that from the German point of view the time would appear opportune for the attempt.

In a further appreciation of the 4th April, Long advanced the suggestion that a projected invasion of Holland had possibly made it necessary to clear German ships from the Netherlands East Indies at all costs.

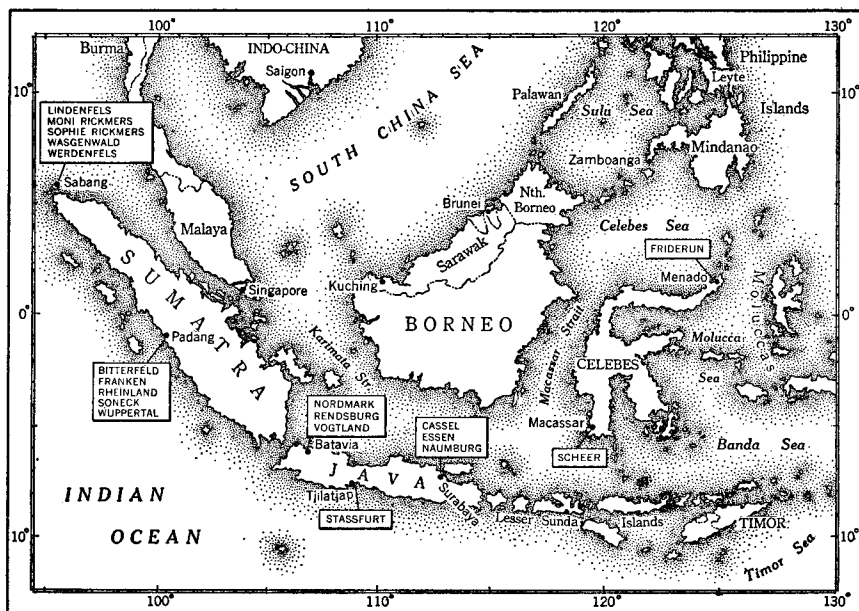
If the appearance of a raider in the Indian Ocean is to be regarded as providing the necessary advantageous conditions for a break, the moment would be equally propitious for ships in Japan and at Bangkok, Marmagoa, Beira, Lorenzo Marques and Kismayu.

⁷ At Sabang: *Lindenfels*, 8,457 tons, 15.4 kts; *Mont Rickmers*, 5,272 tons, 11 kts; *Sophie Rickmers*, 7,033 tons, 12 kts; *Wasgenwald*, 4,990 tons, 10.75 kts; *Werdenfels*, 6,318 tons, 14 kts. At Padang: *Bitterfeld*, 7,659 tons, 15 kts; *Franken*, 7,789 tons, 13.5 kts; *Rheinland*, 6,622 tons, 13 kts; *Soneck*, 2,191 tons, 15 kts; *Wuppertal*, 6,737 tons, 18 kts. At Batavia: *Nordmark*, 7,750 tons, 15 kts; *Rendsburg*, 6,200 tons, 12 kts; *Vogtland*, 6,608 tons, 12 kts. At Surabaya: *Cassel*, 6,047 tons, 12 kts; *Essen*, 5,158 tons, 12 kts; *Naumburg*, 5,878 tons, 12 kts. At Tjilatjap: *Stassfurt*, 7,395 tons, 15 kts. At Macassar: *Scheer*, 8,298 tons, 11.5 kts. At Menado: *Friderun*, 2,464 tons, 9 kts.

DNI Melbourne discounted the possibility of any of these ships being intended as raiders, none being particularly suitable (*Wuppertal* was the only one with sufficient speed) nor known to be equipped. Only two were reported to be armed: *Franken* with one, possibly two, guns; *Stassfurt* with two guns.

This thought had arisen at the Admiralty also. On the 30th March, Mr Churchill, in a minute to the First Sea Lord referring to a cutting from the London *Daily Telegraph* of 29th March reporting twenty German ships preparing to sail from Rotterdam, wrote:

The reason why I cut this from the *Daily Telegraph* and asked my question of the D.N.I. [Admiralty] is because an exodus of German ships from Dutch ports might well be a danger sign in respect of Holland herself. I have no doubt the same thought has occurred to you.⁸



Whatever the reason, an attempted break from the Netherlands East Indies appeared a strong possibility, and British Forces of the Far Eastern Fleet based on Singapore were disposed accordingly, the cruisers *Danae*, *Durban*⁹ and *Dauntless* to patrol off Surabaya, Padang, and Batavia; the submarines *Rainbow*¹ and *Perseus*² to patrol Sunda Strait; the destroyers *Tenedos*³ and *Stronghold*⁴ off Sabang; and the escort vessel *Falmouth*⁵ off Tjilatjap; these ships constituting the "Malaya Force". On the 23rd

⁸ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol I (1948), p. 601.

⁹ HMS *Durban*, cruiser (1921), 4,850 tons, six 6-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 29 kts; sunk as blockship for Mulberry Harbour, Normandy, 9 Jun 1944.

¹ HMS *Rainbow*, submarine (1932), 1,475 tons, one 4-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17.5 kts; sunk off Calabria, S. Italy, 19 Oct 1940.

² HMS *Perseus*, submarine (1930), 1,475 tons, one 4-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17.5 kts; sunk off Zante, Greece, 1 Dec 1941.

³ HMS *Tenedos*, destroyer (1919), 1,000 tons, three 4-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 31 kts; sunk near Colombo, 5 Apr 1942.

⁴ HMS *Stronghold*, destroyer (1919), 905 tons, three 4-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 31 kts; sunk south of Java, 2 Mar 1942.

⁵ HMS *Falmouth*, sloop (1932), 1,060 tons, six 4-in guns, 16 kts.

March the Naval Board informed the Commander-in-Chief, China, Admiral Sir Percy Noble, that *Manoora*—then in the Torres Strait area—could proceed to Darwin to augment this force if desired, and that an intermittent patrol by Royal Australian Air Force aircraft between Darwin and Timor could be arranged. The offer of *Manoora* was accepted, the Commander-in-Chief, China, asking that the armed merchant cruiser might be placed under the orders of the Flag Officer-in-Charge, Singapore, until the completion of the operation, and proceed towards Macassar. This was done, and *Manoora*—still in the colours she wore when in her role of a crack coastal passenger liner, but with 6-inch guns whose bark was loud enough to disperse any ghosts of the coloured, carefree days of winter cruises and coastal runs—arrived at Darwin on the 29th March, and entered the China Station on the 30th. On the 28th of the month, *Westralia* was directed to sail from Sydney to Darwin direct, arrangements being made that she should relieve *Manoora* as early as possible with Malaya Force, *Manoora* then returning to her original station in the North Eastern Area.

Westralia arrived at Darwin on the 7th April. On the 9th, German forces invaded Denmark and Norway, and the following day an Admiralty signal was received by the Naval Board saying that all Danish and Norwegian merchant ships were to be taken under British protection, and should be detained in British harbours or sent there from the high seas. Twenty-four ships were directly affected on the Australia Station⁶ and some others were brought on to the station subsequently under armed guard or escort. The Naval Board broadcast to ships concerned on the station to make for an Australian port, acknowledge receipt of the signal, and advise their expected time of arrival. Only two of the Norwegian ships failed to reply—*Evita*, which was bound for New Zealand and arrived at Wellington on the 1st May, and *Solheim*, which *Swan* intercepted off Fremantle on 13th April and escorted into port. Various other ships were met at sea and escorted into harbour or sent in under armed guard, one such being the Norwegian *Fernlane* (4,310 tons), which *Westralia*, on her way on 12th April from Darwin to relieve *Manoora* with Malaya Force, intercepted north of Australia and sent into Singapore under armed guard; while the following day *Manoora* intercepted the loaded Norwegian tanker *Havbör* (7,614 tons)—which, although bound from Balikpapan to Sydney, was steering north-east when stopped—and escorted her to Darwin. *Manoora*, released from Malaya Force on her relief by *Westralia*, sailed from Darwin on the 15th April escorting *Havbör* and the Norwegian loaded tanker *Thordis* (8,210 tons) to Thursday Island, where she collected two more Norwegian ships, *Höegh Giant* (10,990 tons) and *Anders Jahre* (9,970 tons) continuing on to Brisbane with her four charges on the 19th April.

⁶ Danish: *Astoria* (4,454 tons), *Anglo Maersk* (7,705). Norwegian: *Alcides* (7,634), *Osthav* (8,417), *Solheim* (8,070), *Thorshov* (9,955), *Evita* (6,346), *Elsa* (5,381), *Grena* (8,117), *Norden* (8,440), *Falkefjell* (7,927), *Tai Yin* (7,077), *Skaraas* (9,826), *Aramis* (7,984), *Thermopylae* (6,655), *Pan Europe* (9,468), *Seirstad* (9,916), *Hidlefjord* (7,639), *Velox* (3,831), *Bramora* (6,361), *Gausdal* (4,795), *Triton* (6,607), *Solor* (8,262), *Skotaas* (8,190).

In these early stages, when the attitude of the masters and crews of the Danish and Norwegian ships was not known, precautions had to be taken to ensure against sabotage, the attempted delivery of the ships to the enemy, or their seeking neutral ports. Vessels detained in Australian ports had armed guards placed on board, and in a number of instances ships proceeding between coastal ports or bound from Australia overseas sailed under escort or carried naval armed guards. The position differed as between Danish and Norwegian vessels. Denmark had offered no resistance to German occupation, and Danish vessels were technically of enemy character owing to German control of Denmark, a control made evident on 12th April by a Copenhagen broadcast instructing all Danish ships to put into Spanish or Italian ports, report their arrival, and to try to reach Denmark. Norway, on the other hand, was offering resistance to the German invasion. Her Government had sought British aid immediately Germany struck, and that aid had been sent. She was an ally, and her Government continued to function. An Admiralty message countering the Copenhagen broadcast requested that Danish consuls and shipmasters be informed that the broadcast was made under German dictation and should be disregarded; and on the 17th April the Naval Board, at the request of the Admiralty, arranged a two-hourly broadcast to all Norwegian ships saying that the British Government had been asked by the legitimate Norwegian Government to warn them that all telegrams they might receive from Norway were sent by the Germans, and that the only authentic orders would be those received through a Norwegian Legation or broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation. By a Norwegian Royal Decree of the 20th April, all Norwegian ships over 500 tons gross were placed at the disposal of the Royal Norwegian Government, which established a shipping and trade mission in London with full power to act for it.

The situation of the masters, officers and crews of the Danish and Norwegian ships was not enviable. Many of them feared German reactions on their families in their occupied homelands. Some few individuals in the ships were apparently pro-German in sympathy. But these were exceptions, and in the experience of the R.A.N. officers and ratings who formed armed guards on board the ships, the great majority were pro-Ally, and, once their position had become clear to them, were loyal to the Allied cause, and their ships performed valuable service in it. Whatever else the outcome, the Norwegian campaign paid a dividend in the valuable contribution to British welfare in the war at sea. The losses and damage suffered by the German Navy during the campaign temporarily reduced its effective fleet to one 8-inch gun cruiser, two light cruisers, and four destroyers, at the end of June 1940, "a momentous date". And British gains in the use of Danish and Norwegian merchant ships amounted to some 750 vessels aggregating 3,000,000 tons.⁷ It was, as Mr Churchill remarked at the time, "an easement we never foresaw".

Meanwhile, Malaya Force continued its watch on the German ships in the Netherlands East Indies, Australia making a further contribution

⁷ Churchill, Vol I, pp. 519 and 605.

with the cruisers *Colombo* and *Ceres*. These sailed from Colombo for Singapore on the 27th March, and were due at Fremantle on 12th April; but on the 31st March the Flag Officer-in-Charge, Singapore, told the Naval Board that he proposed employing them in China waters to help to maintain the continuous patrol off the Netherlands East Indies coasts, period indefinite, but may be "for a few weeks". Following the busy preparation period, there had been some days' inactivity among the German ships, and in a third appreciation—of the 22nd April—the Director of Naval Intelligence, Melbourne, suggested a number of reasons: among them the obstructionist policy of the Dutch authorities; the possibility that German plans for an invasion of Holland may have been delayed by the hold up in the Norwegian campaign; and the fact that the ships might retain a state of preparedness and break out when they considered British vigilance relaxed. "The extent of present patrols may be known to the Germans and may have deterred them from sailing. In view of the large amounts that have been spent, continued inactivity cannot be expected, and it must be assumed that a break may occur at any moment."

The matter was resolved on the 10th May with Germany's invasion of Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg, and the immediate seizure by the Dutch authorities of all German ships in the Netherlands East Indies ports, the nineteen vessels concerned being secured successfully. Each of the three main reasons suggested by Commander Long may have contributed toward preventing the German ships from sailing, but there is little doubt that the principal deterrent was the close patrol maintained by the Malaya Force off the Netherlands East Indies ports. With confirmation of the seizing of the German ships by the Dutch, that patrol was withdrawn, and in a signal of the 11th May the Commander-in-Chief, China, congratulating the Malaya Force on the efficient way in which it had fulfilled its task, said that the seizure of the German vessels by the Dutch was only made possible by the vigilance and perseverance which successfully prevented the escape of these ships. With the withdrawal of the patrol, *Westralia* was released from Malaya Force and proceeded to Fremantle, where she arrived on the 28th May and came under the orders of *Adelaide*, which had replaced *Sydney* as Western Force cruiser on the 22nd April. At the request of the Admiralty, *Colombo* and *Ceres* remained under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, China, "until N.E.I. situation cleared up, when will proceed Australia".

IX

During the period in which the German merchant seamen in the Netherlands East Indies had exchanged the fluctuating hopes and apprehensions of possible escape for the level monotony of internment as prisoners of war, the seas they were denied were the scene of considerable activity. On a Sunday afternoon early in February, Lieut-Commander Burrell, on the staff at Navy Office, Melbourne, was deputed to supply the answer to a secret Admiralty message asking what Australian ports could accommodate the Atlantic speed-record holder *Queen Mary*.

Finally it was decided that an anchor berth in Port Jackson was practicable. I had arguments with the Sydney authorities and won my point that single anchor was preferable and safer than mooring at open hawse. . . . It was essential that the anchor be dropped extremely accurately in the restricted anchor berth. A dan buoy with flag was laid accordingly.

So *Queen Mary* exchanged the gales of the North Atlantic for the Roaring Forties of the Southern Ocean, and the albatross whose forebears had swooped and swayed in the wake of Vasco da Gama's tiny vessels nearly four and a half centuries earlier, now soared athwart the westerlies before which the grey bulk of the world's second largest ship sped the Easting Down to Australia. She reached Fremantle from New York via the Cape on 12th April 1940, and four days later dropped her anchor with such precision where indicated on the waters of Sydney Harbour that it struck the dan buoy in its passage.

From the eastward, *Mauretania*, also from New York, crossed the Pacific; and the other vessels of US.3 converged on their Australian and New Zealand embarkation ports. *Queen Mary* and *Mauretania* embarked at Sydney; *Empress of Canada* at Melbourne; *Aquitania*, *Empress of Britain*, and *Empress of Japan* at Wellington; and *Andes*⁸ at Lyttelton.

On 15th April, three days after *Queen Mary's* arrival in Fremantle, *Ettrick*, *Neuralia*, *Strathaird* and *Dunera* of US.2 sailed from Melbourne, escorted by *Ramillies* and *Adelaide*. Commander Garsia⁹ was commodore of the convoy in *Strathaird*. Air escort was provided by R.A.A.F. bombers on the 15th and 16th April, and on the 21st, on which day the convoy reached Fremantle. *Sydney* joined the surface escort on the 19th when the convoy was a little more than 100 miles east of Albany. At Fremantle the *Nevasa*, which had embarked Western Australian troops there, joined the convoy, which sailed on Monday, 22nd April, with R.A.A.F. protection for that day, and *Ramillies* and *Sydney* as ocean escorts. *Adelaide* remained at Fremantle as Western Force cruiser. In the vicinity of Cocos Island on 20th April, *Suffren* relieved *Sydney*, the Australian cruiser being under orders to return to Fremantle to join the escort of US.3. The convoy reached Colombo on 3rd May after an uneventful passage, which was made in four long tacks in view of the possible presence of submarines in the Indian Ocean, an unconfirmed report having been received that U-boats with that destination had sailed from Germany.

For some weeks it had been increasingly evident that Italy's early entry into the war was likely. Italian sensitivity to Anglo-French sea power, and official feeling regarding her own position in the Mediterranean, was expressed with growing insistence, and made the major point of grievance against Britain, particularly in inspired exhortations to the Italian people. Typical of this feeling were the sentiments of an article by Signor Ansaldo in the *Telegrafo* and *Gazetta del Popolo* of 13th January 1940; an article which, wrote the British Ambassador to the Foreign Office five days later,

⁸ Approximately 18,200 were embarked in the ships of US.3; and some 7,200 in US.2.

⁹ Capt R. C. Garsia, RAN. (Lt HMAS *Sydney* 1914-19.) Administrator of Nauru 1933-38. Comd convoys to Suez, Bombay, Singapore, 1940-42, coastal convoys to New Guinea 1942-43, HMAS *Leeuwin*, Naval Depot WA 1943-45. Of Canberra; b. Christchurch, NZ, 9 Oct 1887. Died 18 Feb 1954.

in view of the close connexion between Signor Ansaldo and Count Ciano may be regarded as an authoritative exposition of Italy's present attitude towards the Mediterranean question in general.

Protesting against references in the British press to the strategic efficiency of Gibraltar and Suez, the article claimed that

in the event of a conflict with a non-Mediterranean power, among the various possible hypotheses there is one fact which seems already certain, namely, that in the Mediterranean—a sea created by God expressly for submarine warfare—no one will be able to navigate against Italy's will. . . . If we could be certain of not being misunderstood we would say that the Italians no longer look upon Gibraltar and Suez as a question of naval strategy in the strict sense of the word, but as one of national pride. . . . It is not worth while to remind those with whom it is most clearly advisable to be on friendly terms, of the reasons for a possible conflict, or even simply to utter unwelcome names.

On 3rd February the British Government proposed a trade agreement with Italy which would permit of the sale by that country of war materials to Britain. These proposals were rejected, and on the 17th of the month the Italian Government was informed that as from 1st March the British Government had decided to confiscate the cargoes of Italian ships carrying German coal to Italy from Netherlands ports.¹ This blockade was instituted, and the first ships were held up on the 5th March.

Mussolini [Ciano recorded at the time] is angered at this display of force more than by the practical consequences that might result from it. "Within a short time the guns will fire by themselves. It is not possible that of all people I should become the laughing-stock of Europe. I have to stand for one humiliation after another. As soon as I am ready I shall make the British repent. My intervention in the war will bring about their defeat."²

On 9th March the British Government agreed to release the Italian ships and their cargoes, after receiving an assurance that there had been a misunderstanding on the part of the Italian authorities, and that Italian ships would carry no more coal from Germany. But Italian feeling against Britain was encouraged by the public utterances of Fascist leaders, and it became evident that Mussolini was only waiting a favourable opportunity to enter the war.

The developing situation led the Admiralty, in March, to take steps to reinforce the Mediterranean Fleet; and on the 27th April they informed the Naval Board that, with the exception of mail steamers and ships working Mediterranean ports for cargoes, all British ships had been diverted from the Mediterranean to the Cape route. A Dominions Office cablegram of the same date suggested the possibility of Italy entering the war about the 1st May. As a result of these indications the Commonwealth Government, on 30th April, proposed to the United Kingdom Government the postponement of embarkation of US.3 until the Italian position was

¹ Italy at this time required about 12,000,000 tons of coal annually, largely imported by sea from the Ruhr, since her internal resources—the mines at Arsia, in Istria, and in Sardinia—were quite insufficient.

² *Ciano's Diary* (1947), p. 217.

clear. In a reply of the same date, the Dominions Office said that, unless the situation improved, the Admiralty considered it would be undesirable to pass convoys US.2 and US.3 through the Red Sea, and suggested diversion to the United Kingdom: "It would, of course, give us incomparable pleasure to welcome the Australian and New Zealand troops here." Asking if this course would be agreeable to the Dominions Governments, the message continued that, unless the situation improved, US.2 would be diverted, via the Cape, before entering the Gulf of Aden. "As regards the convoy US.3, we hope that arrangements for embarkation as previously contemplated will be completed. If diversion proves necessary, convoy US.3 will be diverted on the same date as US.2."

The Commonwealth Government decided, as a result of this suggestion, that appreciations should be sought from both the Australian and United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff. The former, in a full appreciation dated 1st May, concluded that "the advice tendered by the Dominions Office should be conformed to unreservedly". Thereupon the War Cabinet, at a meeting that day, decided that embarkation of US.3—temporarily postponed the previous day—should take place, but the convoy should not proceed beyond Fremantle until a decision as to its destination had been reached; and that US.2 should remain at Colombo on arrival there. But on 3rd May—the day US.2 reached Colombo—the Commonwealth Government agreed to allow the convoy to proceed beyond that port, since diversion would still be possible before it reached the Red Sea. A detailed appreciation by the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff was received on 4th May. It examined all the implications of Italy's entry into the war and concluded with the recommendation that

in the present circumstances diversion is unnecessary and the convoys should adhere to their programmes. The situation is being watched from day to day and the Admiralty would issue orders for diversion if the situation should at any time demand it. In that event diversion to the United Kingdom is recommended.

The Australian Chiefs of Staff, in the face of this reversal of advice from the United Kingdom, adhered to their previous recommendation that if the convoys must be diverted it should be to the United Kingdom; and on 8th May the War Cabinet agreed to adherence to the original programs, and that diversion should be to the United Kingdom if necessary, but that the Government must be kept informed and assured of the adequacy of escorts and the safety of the route decided upon. The New Zealand Government similarly agreed to US.3 proceeding as originally arranged, but said that it could not reconcile the opposing views in the Dominions Office messages, and that it retained the right to make the final decision as to the ultimate destination of New Zealand troops after receiving the full views of the Admiralty and the United Kingdom Government.

Convoy US.2, escorted by *Ramillies*, *Kent* and *Suffren*, accordingly sailed from Colombo on 5th May, the escort being reinforced in the Gulf of

Aden by the destroyers *Decoy*³ and *Defender*.⁴ Aden was reached—and left—on the 12th May. *Kent* remained at Aden, but the escort was reinforced for the passage of the narrow waters of the southern Red Sea to counter possible air or submarine attack, and consisted of *Liverpool*⁵—flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Murray, now Senior Officer of escort—*Ramillies*, *Suffren*, *Shoreham*,⁶ *Decoy* and *Defender*. *Liverpool* and *Shoreham* parted company off Port Sudan, and the passage to Suez, where the convoy arrived at daylight on 17th May, was made without incident.

Meanwhile embarkation and sailing of convoy US.3 had proceeded, and on 5th May—the day US.2 sailed from Colombo—the New Zealand ships of the convoy, *Aquitania*, *Empress of Britain*, *Empress of Japan* and *Andes*, which had been escorted across the Tasman by *Canberra* (wearing the flag of R.A.C.A.S.), *Australia*, and *Leander*, arrived at the rendezvous off Sydney. Here they were joined by *Queen Mary* and *Mauretania*, and the convoy departed the same day for Fremantle, the Melbourne ship, *Empress of Canada*, joining in Bass Strait at 4 p.m. on the 6th. Commodore of the convoy was Captain J. W. A. Waller, R.N.—formerly Commanding Officer of *Sydney*—in *Empress of Britain*. Covering air patrols were provided while the convoy was within range in Australian waters, and sweeps were carried out in possibly mined areas. Fremantle was reached on 10th May, and at noon on the 12th US.3 and escort sailed from that port for Colombo.

As stated earlier, it had been intended that *Sydney* should return from escorting US.2 to join the escort of US.3; and she had left US.2 on 28th April when relieved by *Suffren* off Cocos, and set course for Fremantle. On 1st May, however, she received orders to proceed instead to Colombo, and she did so via Sunda Strait and Singapore—where she had to go for fuel—reaching there on 5th May and Colombo on the 8th, shortly afterwards continuing to the Mediterranean.

The day of the arrival of US.3 at Fremantle had brought with it the news of the German invasion of France and the Low Countries. Two days later, when the convoy sailed, the weight of that attack had carried the Germans deep into Holland, Belgium, and France. The likelihood of Italy's declaration of war was thus brought closer. On 15th May, when US.3 was approximately midway between Fremantle and Colombo, an Admiralty signal ordered the convoy to alter course for the Cape of Good Hope, escorted by *Canberra* and *Australia*. The New Zealand cruiser *Leander* was to go to Colombo.

In anticipation of this diversion, the Admiralty, on the 1st May, had requested the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic, to sail an 8-inch gun cruiser to the Cape as relieving escort, and H.M.S. *Shropshire* had been detached for this service. She met the convoy on 20th May and relieved *Canberra*, who, with the signal "Thank you. Good voyage" streaming

³ HMS *Decoy*, destroyer (1933), 1,375 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

⁴ HMS *Defender*, destroyer (1932), 1,375 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk by aircraft off Sidi Barrani, 11 Jul 1941.

⁵ HMS *Liverpool*, cruiser (1938), 9,400 tons, twelve 6-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 32.3 kts.

⁶ HMS *Shoreham*, sloop (1931), 1,105 tons, six 4-in guns, 16.5 kts.

from her halyards, steamed between the two lines of ships and cheering troops on her way back to Australia. Proceeding south of the Agulhas Bank—where enemy-moored mines had been found on 13th May—the convoy, escorted by *Shropshire* and *Australia*, reached Capetown on the morning of the 26th, air cover for a short while before arrival being provided by South African aircraft.

The northward voyage from the Cape was resumed on the 31st of the month. Because of the refusal of the Asiatic crews of *Empress of Japan* and *Empress of Canada* to proceed beyond Capetown, the first-named vessel was withdrawn from the convoy and her troops distributed among the other transports; *Empress of Canada*, manned in lieu of her Asiatic crew by naval ratings taking passage in the convoy, remained with US.3. *Australia* left the escort at Capetown, being relieved by H.M.S. *Cumberland*.⁷ Convoy and escort arrived at Freetown, Sierra Leone, on 7th June, and sailed again on the 8th, with the escort augmented by the aircraft carrier *Hermes*,⁸ which remained with it until the 10th. From the 12th to the 14th of the month H.M.S. *Dorsetshire* provided additional escort; and with her departure the escort was strengthened by the battle cruiser *Hood*, the aircraft carrier *Argus*,⁹ and six destroyers—three Canadian, and H.M. Ships *Broke*,¹ *Westcott*, and *Wanderer*.² The following day, in the Western Approaches, two more destroyers, H.M. Ships *Warwick*³ and *Witch*,⁴ joined the escort, and air cover during daylight was provided by Sunderland flying-boats. In the mid-morning of 16th June, US.3 arrived at the end of the Clyde searched channel, and by early afternoon all the transports were safely anchored off Greenock.

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Great events had occurred during the passage from Australia of US.3. The convoy had reached Fremantle on the day the German forces launched their attack on Holland, Belgium, and France. It was well north of the Atlantic, off the western shoulder of Africa, when Mussolini, eager for his share of spoils and glory, brought Italy into the war on the 10th June. Its ships anchored in the Clyde Estuary on the eve of the capitulation of France, last of the three invaded countries to succumb to the German onslaught. In that afternoon of the convoy's arrival, Mr Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Britain since the day the spectacular German advance began, dictated a message outlining the Empire's situation to the Prime Ministers of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, "to lessen

⁷ HMS *Cumberland*, cruiser (1928), 10,000 tons, eight 8-in guns, 31.5 kts.

⁸ HMS *Hermes*, aircraft carrier (1924), 10,850 tons, six 5.5-in guns, three 4-in AA guns, fifteen aircraft, 25 kts; was first vessel specially designed by Admiralty as aircraft carrier; sunk by Jap aircraft south of Trincomalee, 9 Apr 1942.

⁹ HMS *Argus*, aircraft carrier (1918—converted, while building, from merchant ship), 14,000 tons, eighteen small guns, twenty aircraft, 20 kts.

¹ HMS *Broke*, destroyer (1925), 1,480 tons, five 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 31 kts; lost in forcing boom at Algiers 9 Nov 1942.

² HMS *Wanderer*, destroyer (1919), 1,120 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 31 kts.

³ HMS *Warwick*, destroyer (1918), 1,100 tons, four 4-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 31 kts; sunk by German submarine off Cornwall, 20 Feb 1944.

⁴ HMS *Witch*, destroyer (1924), 1,140 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts.

the shock of the impending French surrender". In the closing paragraph he said:

I have given you this full explanation to show you that there are solid reasons behind our resolve not to allow the fate of France, whatever it may be, to deter us from going on to the end. . . . We shall let you know at every stage how you can help, being assured that you will do all in human power, as we, for our part, are entirely resolved to do.⁵

The matter of giving all possible help to Britain had for some weeks engaged the attention of the Australian Government and Chiefs of Staff, becoming of greater urgency as the situation in Europe became more grave. As far back as the 27th February 1940 the War Cabinet had approved in principle a suggestion by Admiral Colvin that an Australian 8-inch gun cruiser should exchange with a similar vessel of the Royal Navy, to give the Australian ship war experience, and an exchange of views with the Admiralty had found the First Sea Lord in favour providing that, for reasons of economy, the exchange was for more than one year. On the 20th April, when relations with Italy were becoming increasingly strained, the Naval Staff reviewed the situation with the object of seeing how the Australian cruisers could best be employed to help the over-all effort at sea should Italy enter the war. With the reduction of German naval strength through losses in Norway, it was considered unlikely that any German attack on the Australia Station could exceed that by one 8-inch gun cruiser, or one 6-inch gun cruiser or armed merchant cruiser. The Italian naval forces—with the exception of seven destroyers, eight submarines, and a few small craft based on Massawa in the Red Sea—were in the Mediterranean, whence the possibility of their breaking out was thought remote; and evidence was that only meagre preparations had been made by Italy for the conversion to armed merchant cruisers of merchant vessels trading east of Suez. The menace of Italian surface action on the Australia Station could therefore be disregarded, though it was possible that a submarine from the Red Sea could operate off south-west Australia with the help of a mother ship. As to Japan, it was believed that there was little prospect of her entering the war in the near future. She was preoccupied in China; the attitude of the United States of America made an early war move by her unlikely; and her economic position discouraged precipitate action. The Naval Staff therefore considered that the forces retained on the Australia Station were out of proportion for their task—that of the protection of shipping on the station. This, it was held, could be achieved so far as cruisers were concerned, by the retention of *Canberra*, *Perth*, *Adelaide*, and the armed merchant cruisers *Manoora* and *Westralia*, permitting the release for service elsewhere of *Australia*, and of the two R.N. cruisers *Ceres* and *Colombo* then at Singapore. As a first result of this review the exchange of *Australia* with a cruiser of the Royal Navy, on the basis suggested by the First Sea Lord, was proposed to the War Cabinet, and accepted, and the Admiralty was informed by signal on the 17th May.

⁵ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol II (1949), p. 174.

At this period the thoughts of Australians turned more and more to the Home Country. They were gloomy days, when the news of the war in Europe was consistently bad, and the threat to Britain loomed suddenly large and increasingly menacing. Far removed from the centre of conflict, and lacking that elation which comes with a near and pressing danger, the Australian people were a prey to deep anxieties concerning the future of their kin overseas. They were anxieties shared by the Government, who correctly interpreted the general desire to do everything possible to help.

On the 13th May the War Cabinet had agreed on the importance of accelerating war measures, with the specific direction to the navy to examine the possibilities of enlisting and training additional men for overseas service. On the 22nd of the month they decided that the cruisers *Ceres* and *Colombo* should not come to Australia, but should be left at the disposal of the Admiralty; that the R.A.N. should man ten local defence vessels⁶ being built for the Admiralty in Australia; approved an Admiralty proposal that the trained ships' companies of the Australian destroyers in the Mediterranean, augmented as necessary, should be made available to man new destroyers being built in Britain, these new ships to serve as units of the Royal Australian Navy; and approved also that Australia should continue to maintain the five old destroyers manned by the R.A.N., and that the R.A.N. should enter and train anti-submarine officers and ratings for service in the Royal Navy. The suggestion that the crews of the old destroyers be transferred to new ships originated from Admiral Tovey⁷—then Rear-Admiral Destroyers, Mediterranean Fleet. In a letter of 17th April 1940 the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham,⁸ wrote to the First Sea Lord:

There is one point for your consideration. The officers and men of these Australian destroyers out here are magnificent material and are quite wasted in these old ships. Tovey has suggested that they might be transferred lock, stock and barrel to five new ships and used at home. They certainly are the most lively and undefeated fellows I have ever had to do with.

An Admiralty signal of 14th May 1940 to the Naval Board set the ball rolling in Australia.

Apart from relinquishing claims on the *Ceres* and *Colombo*, these decisions entailed the raising and training for service overseas of an additional 1,790 officers and ratings, a number then considered by the Naval Board to be the maximum expansion practicable within the next twelve months with the existing accommodation, training facilities, and instructional staff at Flinders Naval Depot. This was greater than a token gesture. But more was to follow.

⁶ These vessels were designated Australian Minesweepers ("AMS Vessels") and later were known as "corvettes". An Australian modification of an Admiralty design, they performed service far in excess of that of local defence vessels, as will later be seen. They carried out escort, anti-submarine, and minesweeping duties in the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and the South-West Pacific, as well as in Australian waters.

⁷ Admiral of Fleet Lord Tovey, GCB, KBE, DSO; RN. Comd HMS *Rodney* 1932-34; Rear-Adm Destroyers, Mediterranean, 1938-40; Vice-Adm, 2nd in comd Mediterranean Fleet, 1940; C-in-C Home Fleet 1940-43; C-in-C Nore 1943-46. B. 1885.

⁸ Admiral of Fleet Viscount Cunningham, KT, GCB, OM, DSO; RN. Dep Chief of Naval Staff 1938-39; C-in-C Mediterranean 1939-42; C-in-C Allied Naval Forces Mediterranean 1943; First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff 1943-46. Of Edinburgh; b. Dublin, 7 Jan 1883.

On the same day that the above decisions were reached by War Cabinet—and made public by Mr Menzies in Parliament—Admiral Colvin proposed to the Minister for the Navy, Mr Cameron,⁹ that *Australia*, on arriving at the Cape with US.3, should remain in that area and assist in covering Australian troop movements and other operations; that *Canberra* should be used to escort troopships across the Indian Ocean, or part way; and that *Westralia* should be allocated to duties similar to *Canberra*'s. These proposals, as regarded the two 8-inch gun cruisers, were approved by the War Cabinet, and on 3rd June the Naval Board informed the Admiralty by signal that the Commonwealth Government proposed that *Canberra* should proceed to the Cape for service, including escort duties with Australian troop convoys, under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic; and that *Australia* should be placed at the Admiralty's disposition immediately for service in Home or Mediterranean waters. This offer, in the case of both ships, to be without exchange or relief. It was an offer "most gratefully accepted by the Admiralty".

This left for service in Australian waters the cruisers *Perth* and *Adelaide*; the armed merchant cruisers *Westralia* and *Manoora*; and the sloops *Swan*, *Yarra*, and *Parramatta*—this last named having commissioned under Lieut-Commander Walker¹ on the 8th April. There were, in addition, the auxiliary vessels of the minesweeping groups. But, with the increasing need of Britain overseas in the crisis threatened by the possible collapse of France, the Commonwealth Government, on the advice of its naval advisers after a careful survey of the risks involved on the Australia Station, decided further to reduce local naval strength in the effort to help overseas.

At a meeting of the War Cabinet—attended by the Chiefs of Staff—on the 11th June, the day after Italy declared war, Admiral Colvin was asked his views on the naval strategical situation should France be defeated. He said they were that Britain would have to withdraw from the Mediterranean "except for the use that could be made by entry through the eastern end at Port Said"; that "the enemy would probably base naval vessels on French Atlantic ports, and that should Spain and Portugal be brought in on the side of Germany and Italy their ports might be used also. Should the war take such a course, an entire recasting of naval strategy would be necessary." It was a sound appreciation. Two days later, at a meeting of the Full Cabinet at which the Chiefs of Staff were present during preliminary discussions on Empire cooperation and local defence, Colvin proposed that additional naval assistance could be given to Britain at once by releasing *Westralia* and *Parramatta* for service in the Indian Ocean, with a further sloop about the end of July. As a result of this proposal—and those from the Chiefs of Staff of Army

⁹ Hon A. G. Cameron. (1st AIF: 27 Bn 1916-19.) Min for Commerce and the Navy 1940; Maj Intell Corps 1940-44; Speaker, House of Reps, 1949-56. Of Loxton and Oakbank, SA; b. Happy Valley, SA, 22 Mar 1895. Died 9 Aug 1956. (Cameron succeeded Stewart as Minister for the Navy, but Stewart, although holding the portfolio, had never functioned as Minister for the Navy, the duties being carried out by Street as Assistant Minister.)

¹ Cdr J. H. Walker, MVO, DSC; RAN. (HMS *Revenge*, 1919.) Comd HMAS *Parramatta* 1940-41. Of Avoca, Vic; b. 16 Jul 1901. Lost in sinking of *Parramatta*, 27 Nov 1941.

and Air advocating increased aid to Britain—the Prime Minister telegraphed to the United Kingdom Government asking for information “covering the probable alternatives with which the Empire may be confronted”, which the Commonwealth Government felt “is of the greatest possible urgency to enable us to review our policy on local defence and Empire cooperation and to decide on the measures necessary to give effect to it. Under certain contingencies it might be possible to render further naval assistance such as one armed merchant cruiser, one sloop at once, and an additional sloop at the end of July for use in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea area.”

The French Government under M. Reynaud collapsed on 16th June. The following day that under Marshal Pétain initiated armistice negotiations with Germany; and the British Commonwealth had lost its main ally, and the support of the major part of the powerful French Fleet, now immobilised in French metropolitan and North African ports, with the added danger that it might fall into German hands. At a meeting of the Australian War Cabinet on the 25th June, at which the Chiefs of the Naval and Air Staffs attended, both Chiefs of Staff informed the Cabinet that in their opinion the defection of France strengthened rather than weakened their earlier recommendations for added support for Britain. On the naval side, the War Cabinet thereupon decided that Admiral Colvin's proposal of the 13th June be approved. On that same day, 25th June, *Westralia*, which had been operating in the West under the orders of *Adelaide* since her arrival there on 28th May, sailed from Fremantle for Colombo for service under the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies. The following day *Parramatta* arrived in Fremantle from eastern Australia, and on the 29th of the month sailed from that port in the wake of *Westralia* for the same destination and duties. On the 29th also, *Canberra* (Captain Farncomb²) sailed from Fremantle escorting the troopship *Strathmore* (23,428 tons) for Capetown, and for service with the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic.

XI

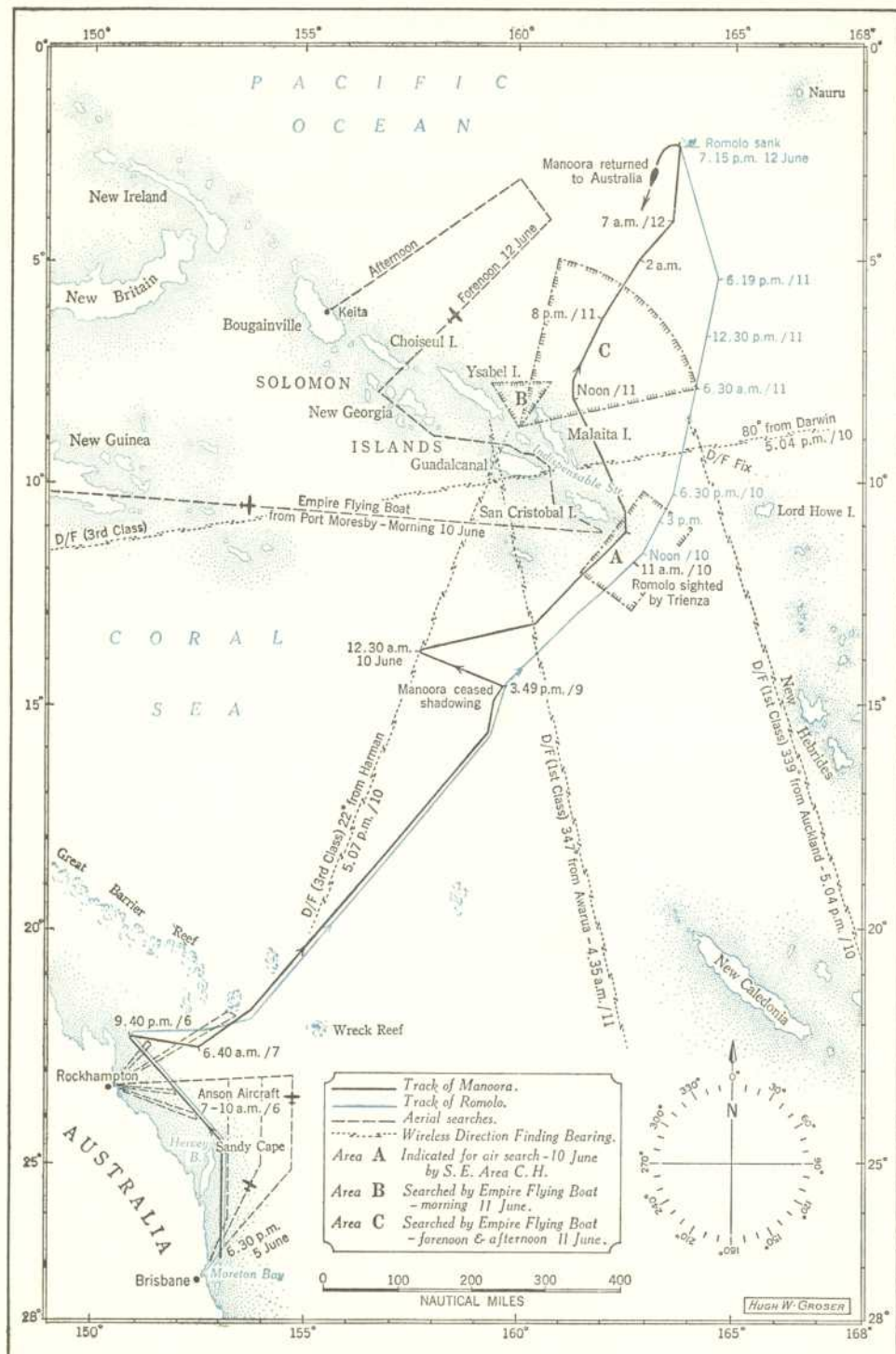
War with Italy began at 9 a.m. on 11th June Eastern Australian time. There were then two Italian merchant vessels on the Australia Station, *Remo* and *Romolo* (each of 9,780 tons), passenger-cargo vessels belonging to the Lloyd Triestino Company. *Remo* had arrived at Fremantle from Italy on the 5th June, and was seized in that port without difficulty or incident on the declaration of war. *Romolo* was at sea, having sailed from Brisbane on the 5th June, ostensibly bound for Genoa via Macassar.

For some days before her departure, indications that Italy might soon enter the war had been manifest, including broadcasts in plain language from Coltano wireless station instructing Italian merchant ships to accel-

² Rear-Adm H. B. Farncomb, CB, DSO, MVO; RAN. (HMS *Royal Sovereign* 1917.) Comd HMAS's *Perth* 1939-40, *Canberra* 1940-41, *Australia* 1942-44, HMS *Attacker* 1944, Aust Sqn 1944-45 and 1946-49; Supt Training FND 1945-46. Was first graduate of Naval College promoted captain, and first to fly flag as RACAS. He assumed command *Canberra* June 1940 vice Capt W. R. Patterson, who reverted to RN. Of Gordon, NSW; b. Sydney, 28 Feb 1899.

erate their movements. *Romolo* had arrived in Brisbane from Sydney on the 30th May, and an intercepted message from her owners to their Sydney office had emphasised that she must sail thence not later than the 31st. On that date the Naval Board instructed *Manoora*, then at Hervey Bay, some 150 miles north of Brisbane, to shadow *Romolo* on her departure. *Manoora's* Commanding Officer—Commander Spurgeon—was informed that shore-based aircraft would cooperate, and that on the outbreak of war with Italy the capture of *Romolo* would become his immediate objective. He decided that, although Hervey Bay was on *Romolo's* route for Torres Strait—the direct road for Macassar—it was too far from her point of departure if she made a break to the eastward. He therefore took *Manoora*—still in her peacetime colours of the Adelaide Steamship Company—south to Moreton Bay “to sit on the bolt hole”.

Meanwhile *Romolo* had been subjected to delaying tactics in Brisbane. She was not allowed to embark additional oil fuel, was moved to a berth where any attempts at scuttling would be minimised, and her Customs clearances were withheld as long as possible. By the 5th June, however, the probable date of Italy's entry into the war was no clearer. The ship could not be delayed indefinitely, and she was allowed to sail, clearing Moreton Bay at 6.30 p.m. with a Torres Strait pilot on board. *Manoora* sailed also, shadowing from ahead throughout the night of the 5th—*Romolo* having all her lights on—and throughout the following day, keeping hull down during daylight but closing in to about eight miles after dark. This distance separated the two ships when, at 9 p.m. on the 6th, *Romolo's* lights disappeared. *Manoora* immediately turned and made for *Romolo's* last seen position; but when after an hour's search she was not found, Spurgeon concluded she must be attempting evasion, and reasoned that, if she had continued up the Barrier Reef, aircraft could continue the shadowing the following day, whereas they would have little chance of doing so directly to seaward, and that his best plan was to search in that direction. He accordingly increased to full speed and steered east, and “by extreme good fortune *Romolo* was sighted at daybreak about three miles astern. She altered away but I followed her round, having decided to leave no doubt in her mind that I was going to stay with her.” Hitherto it had been endeavoured to conceal from *Romolo* the fact that she was being shadowed—not an easy task, as *Manoora* had a speed margin of only three or four knots over *Romolo's* twelve to thirteen, and could not therefore get too far away. And that the Italian's suspicions were aroused was suggested in that she now had her boats turned out and the wireless masts rigged in two of them, apparently in preparation for scuttling if need be. After steering east for a while, *Romolo* steadied on a north-easterly course, which the two ships pursued until the afternoon of the 9th when, acting on instructions signalled by the Naval Board, *Manoora* ceased shadowing and proceeded towards Singapore, first embarking the Torres Strait pilot from *Romolo*. The ships parted company—in a position about 300 miles due south of Guadalcanal—with an exchange of *bon voyage* messages by flag signals.



Manoora's Search for Romolo

The reason for the Naval Board's decision to cease shadowing was that on the morning of the 9th Italy's intentions as to when she would enter the war were still in doubt, and shadowing might continue indefinitely. But by the evening of the 9th, the situation with Italy had so developed that instructions to resume shadowing were signalled to *Manoora*. By this time, however, the two ships were 160 miles apart.

From *Romolo's* Torres Strait pilot—an unmobilised seagoing reserve officer—Spurgeon learned that the Italian ship was proceeding to Yokohama, that her maximum speed was probably 12.5 knots, that she had only a large-scale chart of the Pacific on board, and that the general impression among her people was that Italy would not enter the war for about a month. Spurgeon reckoned that she would probably try to make Yokohama via Truk, and would be likely to keep in the centre of the channel between the Solomons and Santa Cruz island. He therefore increased to full speed and steered to cut the corner of San Cristobal, easternmost of the Solomons, and start a curve of search³ from the coast of Malaita to starboard.

At this stage of the war, the machinery for the coordination of operations when more than one Service was involved was, although established, still in process of building, and far from complete. Defence of sea communications was a combined function of the Navy and Air Force, the naval role being that of offensive and defensive action against enemy ships, the air that of reconnaissance and attack within range of shore-based aircraft. While each Chief of Staff remained in control of, and responsible for, the operations of his own Service, coordination of operational control was necessary in any joint operations. To meet this need, Area Combined Headquarters—of which two then existed in eastern Australia, the South Eastern at Melbourne, the North Eastern at Port Moresby—had been set up to control joint naval, military and air operations in those respective areas, with the North Eastern A.C.H. operating under the over-all direction of the South Eastern, which A.C.H., with a Combined Operations Room, was at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, and thus under the direct control of the three Chiefs of Staff.

When *Manoora* was directed by the Naval Board to resume shadowing, the area of operations was beyond aircraft range from the Australian mainland. No. 11 Squadron, R.A.A.F., consisting of two Empire flying-boats—one of which was away being overhauled—and two amphibious aircraft, was based on Port Moresby; and South Eastern A.C.H. ordered air searches to be carried out by the aircraft of this squadron on the 10th June, an area 150 miles by 90 miles to the east of San Cristobal being indicated for the flying-boat. Communication between the two Area Combined Headquarters was poor, signals taking upwards of five hours to pass, and throughout the 10th there was uncertainty in Melbourne as to exactly what searches had been carried out from Port Moresby, and it was not until 10.15 that night that the South Eastern A.C.H. learned

³ A curve of search is a scientific way of conducting a search based on the assumed limits of an enemy's course and speed.

that the search directed had been incomplete. Owing to a misinterpretation of the instruction, the Port Moresby A.C.H. had directed the flying-boat to search the area between Rennell Island and San Cristobal en route to the defined search area, with the result that time did not permit of a full search of that area. This was unfortunate, as it was subsequently learned that *Romolo* passed through the centre of that area on the 10th, being about sixty miles east of San Cristobal at 3 p.m. Eastern Australian time, when *Manoora* was about fifty miles due west of her and steering north on a slightly diverging course.

On the 11th Port Moresby intended searching an area 160 miles in an east-west by fifty miles in a north-south direction, to the east of Malaita, and informed Melbourne accordingly. Late in the forenoon of the 11th, however, Moresby reported that the aircraft had failed to reach the area because of head winds, and had been directed by signal to search instead an area in and north of Indispensable Strait, between Guadalcanal and Malaita. The reason for this alternative search was that radio stations in Australia and New Zealand had intercepted transmissions from *Romolo*, and had passed the bearings of these signals to Melbourne. One of these bearings—which was in turn passed by South Eastern A.C.H. to Port Moresby—indicated that *Romolo* might be in that area. Although only a third-class bearing, and not accepted as reliable by Melbourne, Port Moresby assumed it should be taken into consideration because it had been passed to them. As soon as it heard of the proposed search, South Eastern A.C.H. signalled Port Moresby to cancel it and search instead to the north-eastward of Malaita. But it was then too late to do so until the flying-boat, already searching Indispensable Strait, returned to Tulagi to refuel, after which the search of the area north-east of Malaita was carried out.

In the meantime, early in the morning of the 11th, the Naval Board had broadcast to British merchant ships known to be in the Solomon Islands area, to keep a lookout for *Romolo*, and to break wireless silence and report her if sighted; and at 2 p.m. the British Phosphate Commission steamer *Trienza* (6,378 tons) reported sighting a vessel resembling *Romolo*, apparently attempting to alter her colouring, at 11 a.m. on the 10th, her position then being south-east of San Cristobal, in the centre of the aircraft search area which had been designated by South Eastern A.C.H. for that day. The ship sighted was, signalled the master of *Trienza*, painted half grey and half white, "resembling a camouflaged blackbird". This information was signalled to *Manoora* by the Combined Operations Room, Melbourne, in the evening of the 11th.

Before he received it, however, Spurgeon had been in visual communication with the flying-boat, which had sighted *Manoora* while carrying out its search to the north-east of Malaita, and which told him that no enemy had been sighted over an arc of seventy degrees—to the north-east of Malaita—for 160 miles from *Manoora's* position. "This aircraft," Spurgeon wrote in his subsequent report of the operation, "must have been within twenty miles of *Romolo* at the end of his patrol. He reported nothing in

sight on passing me while returning to base, and this negative report enabled me to continue my curve of search to starboard throughout the night without much chance of missing *Romolo*."

By the following morning—the 12th—*Romolo* was out of range of shore-based aircraft, and a favourable result of the search depended on *Manoora*. Spurgeon lost an hour between 6.30 and 7.30 by attempting to fly off the ship's aircraft. *Manoora* had no catapult, and the aircraft—an amphibian—had to be hoisted out and lowered to the water and take off from there. Three attempts were made by the aircraft to take off, but the state of the sea, although *Manoora* made an oil slick for her, precluded success, and in the final attempt a wing float collapsed and the aircraft had to be hoisted in again. To make up lost time and distance, Spurgeon decided to steer due north before resuming his curve of search, which he reckoned on recommencing at 11.30 a.m. "But at 11.20 the aloft lookout reported a ship hull down on the starboard bow." It was *Romolo*.

The quarry was sighted, but not caught. *Romolo* was well beyond gun range, and altered away, with *Manoora* in chase. Spurgeon signalled by lamp to the Italian to stop; and made by wireless: "Stop instantly or I will fire. Do not attempt to sink ship. Do not abandon ship because I will not pick you up." *Romolo* acknowledged the signal and replied "O.K.", but continued on her course.

She was still beyond gun range when, at 12.30, a heavy rain squall hid her from *Manoora*. When she was sighted again about fifteen minutes later, *Romolo* was stopped and listing to port, her boats were lowered, and she was heavily on fire; and when, at 1.15, *Manoora* had closed her, she "was burning violently and I decided not to board owing to the danger to personnel. From experience with the burning *Ausonia* [12,995 tons] in Alexandria I considered it impossible to extinguish the fire."⁴ *Romolo's* passengers and crew—totalling 129—were picked up, unhurt, by *Manoora*. About 4.30 in the afternoon *Manoora* fired seven rounds into the derelict to hasten her sinking, which was slow, although the kingston valves had been opened. "As darkness fell she made an inspiring sight, on fire, down by the stern with the poop submerged. She lurched to starboard, and her bulkheads gave with a muffled report, and she sank stern first very suddenly." It was 7.15 p.m., in position 2 degrees 20 minutes south, 163 degrees 45 minutes east; approximately 220 miles south-west of Nauru Island.

On board *Manoora* the passengers and crew of *Romolo*—including three stewardesses and five women passengers—were made comfortable in cabins, the wardroom, and public rooms. The Italian cooks were given a section of the galley and cooked for their own people, and "the opportunity was taken of getting some instruction in baking for the ship's baker from the Italian pastry cooks". The *Romolo's* master, Captain Gavino,

⁴ As Executive Officer of *Australia* when she was exchange cruiser with the Mediterranean Fleet in 1935, Spurgeon was present in her when the Italian liner *Ausonia* burst into flames entering Alexandria harbour and was totally destroyed, boats from the Mediterranean Fleet assisting in the rescue of her passengers and crew.

said he had intended proceeding to Yokohama via Ponape, and had painted the ship dark grey, employing all hands on this task. He had insufficient fuel to proceed to South America, having been prevented from embarking any before leaving Australia. This was the first Spurgeon had heard of the fuel being denied in Brisbane, and he later remarked that the information "might have been of the greatest value to me if it had been communicated as it would have ruled out the possibility of escape to the eastward. As it was, the correct conclusion was arrived at accidentally."

Yet not altogether accidentally. Certainly Spurgeon had only the word of Captain Gavino to go on—as given to the Torres Strait pilot—that *Romolo* was making for Yokohama; but there was some confirmation of this during the 10th and on the 11th by the wireless transmission bearings which, although inaccurate, gave a general idea of the area from which *Romolo* was transmitting; and in the sighting report from *Trienza*, which was of great value. It may have been that, as the Torres Strait pilot reported, the general impression in *Romolo* was that Italy would not enter the war for another month; and perhaps Gavino shared that view.

It was unfortunate that *Manoora* could not prevent the scuttling. But the operation was otherwise successful, and provided useful exercises and valuable lessons, among these being the need for prompt and reliable communication between the Area Combined Headquarters; the value of long-range flying-boats in such operations—the amphibious aircraft of No. 11 Squadron took little part—but the need for the improvement in the standard of reconnaissance in their crews; the weight to be placed on wireless direction finding bearings in relation to other evidence; and the limitations under which shipboard aircraft worked in depending on sea conditions when there was no catapult. They were lessons of which some advantage was taken; although no catapult was fitted in *Manoora*.

So ended the first of the war's operations against enemy ships in Australian waters. *Manoora* had another task to perform before returning to Australia. The American merchant vessel *Admiral Wiley* (3,514 tons) had gone ashore on a reef on Kitava Island in the Trobriands, and Spurgeon was directed to proceed there and give assistance, and he reached Kitava on the 15th. There was nothing he could do to help the stranded ship, but he embarked seven officers and twenty-four ratings of her crew; and *Manoora*, with her total of 160 passengers, arrived at Townsville two days later.

XII

Two days after *Manoora* reached Townsville came the first intimation of positive enemy naval activity in Australasian waters. It supported earlier indications that German surface raiders were again at sea. As stated above, German mines had been discovered off Cape Agulhas on the 13th May. Five days later the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic, reported the sighting of a possible raider on the 2nd of the month in that ocean, the likelihood of the accuracy of the report being increased by the fact that the British ship *Scientist* (6,199 tons) was eight days overdue on a voyage

from Durban to Freetown. The Naval Board thereupon instructed merchant ships not to burn navigation lights on Australian coastal voyages, and stated that the possibility of mines being laid on the Australia Station could not be ignored.

At 10 p.m. on the 18th June, the trans-Pacific liner *Niagara*,⁵ employed on the route between Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, sailed from Auckland, New Zealand. A little more than four hours later, at 2.30 in the morning of the 19th, Sydney radio intercepted a distress message from *Niagara* saying that she was disabled as the result of an explosion. The ship was then in the entrance to the Hauraki Gulf, about sixty miles from Auckland. Seventeen minutes later a further message from *Niagara* stated that the ship, which was sinking rapidly, was being abandoned. At 3.50 the Naval Board received a signal from the New Zealand Naval Board, Wellington, saying that *Niagara* had sunk shortly before 3 o'clock in position 35 degrees 53 minutes south, 174 degrees 54 minutes east, "origin explosion not yet known". During the afternoon of the 19th, however, the New Zealand Naval Board informed the Admiralty and other interested naval authorities—including the Commonwealth Naval Board—that a mine had been swept up in the vicinity of *Niagara's* sinking, and that all sailings from New Zealand ports had been suspended. Within a few hours came information from New Zealand that a second mine had been swept up, that both had been identified as German, and that they had the appearance of having been very recently laid.

Immediate precautions were taken in Australian waters. All merchant ships on coastal routes were instructed to keep outside the 100-fathom line. Coastwatchers were warned to be on the alert for suspicious vessels or happenings. Air searches, extending 150 miles to seaward, were carried out over Bass Strait for a possible surface minelayer. *Yarra* and *Orara* of the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla were refitting, but *Parramatta*, *Swan*, and *Doomba* were in Adelaide, and the Naval Board instructed *Parramatta* to carry out searching sweeps in Investigator Strait, and *Swan* and *Doomba* to sweep off Cape Otway. The sailing from Sydney of the P. and O. liner *Strathmore*, carrying 430 troops for the United Kingdom, was postponed from the afternoon of the 19th to that of the 20th, when she sailed under the escort of *Perth*,⁶ who gave the transport protection against possible mines by steaming ahead of her with paravanes streamed, *Strathmore* lacking these safeguards. The two ships reached Melbourne in the morning of the 22nd June, sailing again that evening to the westward. *Perth* escorted the transport until 4.45 p.m. on the 23rd, when she parted company at 140 degrees east—just west of the Victorian-South Australian border—and proceeded to patrol the Western Approaches to Bass Strait, while *Strathmore*, to whom *Canberra* was giving cover to the south, proceeded unescorted to Adelaide. When later *Strathmore* sailed from Adelaide,

⁵ *Niagara*, steamer (1913), Canadian-Australasian Line Ltd, 13,415 tons, 16 kts; sunk by German mines, 60 mls from Auckland, 19 Jun 1940.

⁶ *Perth* was now flagship, and under the command of Capt Sir Philip Bowyer-Smyth, who had succeeded Farncomb on 6 Jun. On the 7th the Flag had been transferred to *Perth* from *Canberra*, as that ship was going overseas.

Canberra met her west of Kangaroo Island and escorted her to Fremantle, and thence onward across the Indian Ocean.

For the next two days extensive searches of Bass Strait were carried out by sea and air. *Parramatta* sailed for Fremantle, reaching that port on the 26th; but *Perth* continued patrolling in the Western Approaches to Bass Strait, while *Manoora* was similarly employed in the Eastern Approaches, and *Swan* and *Doomba* carried out searching sweeps off Otway. Air searches over the Western and Eastern Approaches were each by three aircraft.

The first intimation of mines having been laid off Cape Agulhas had been a loud explosion heard by the lighthouse keeper on the cape. Early in the evening of the 22nd June, a loud explosion at sea to the south-eastward was heard from the shore signal station at Cape Otway. Searches by the three surface vessels, and by four aircraft from Laverton, were fruitless, and the origin of the detonation remains a mystery. It was not a mine. It was subsequently learned that those of the Hauraki Gulf field were by some months the first enemy mines laid in Australasian waters in the 1939-45 war. They had been laid—to a total of 228—not, as was at the time thought likely, by the raider responsible for laying the Cape Agulhas field, but by the German armed merchant cruiser *Orion*,⁷ which had sailed from Germany on the 6th April, and after sinking one ship, the British *Haxby* (5,207 tons), in the North Atlantic, had proceeded to New Zealand via Cape Horn, her first operation in southern waters being the laying of the Hauraki Gulf minefield during the night of the 13th-14th June. The operation was carried out in good visibility between 7.30 in the evening of the 13th and 2.30 the following morning, during which period the raider sighted three outward bound ships and one inward bound. Her task completed, she slipped away on an easterly course on the Australia-Panama route, and was presumably sighted by the New Zealand Pacific Administration vessel *Maui Pomare* (1,203 tons) on the 15th June in the vicinity of the Kermadec Islands, some 500 miles north-east of Auckland. On receiving *Maui Pomare's* report of sighting a suspicious vessel, the New Zealand Naval Board dispatched *Achilles* from Auckland to the Kermadec Islands. But it was by then the 24th June, and the raider was several hundred miles away to the northward and eastward in the broad spaces of the Pacific, with her identity and whereabouts still a mystery. On the 25th June, the Australian air and sea searches of Bass Strait having disclosed nothing suspicious, they were discontinued, and *Perth* and *Manoora* proceeded to Sydney.

XIII

Apart from the activities of the squadron, various measures had been taken in the close defence of Australian ports and waters during the ten months to the 30th June 1940. From the outset of war the Naval Control Service had been in operation, fitting into the world wide Admiralty control

⁷ *Orion*, German auxiliary cruiser (1930), 7,800 tons, six 5.9-in guns, six torp tubes, 228 mines; sunk by Russian air attack, 4 May 1945.

of merchant shipping; as had also the Examination Service at defended ports. In addition to the Port War Signal Stations at these ports, War Signal Stations, whose function was to report shipping movements and other intelligence, had been established and manned by the R.A.N. at Albany, Western Australia; Neptune Island, South Australia; Cape Otway, Wilson's Promontory, and Gabo Island, Victoria; and in Queensland at Archer Point, Wednesday, Thursday, and Booby Islands. And all round the mainland and Tasmanian coasts, and in the New Guinea and Solomon Islands, the coastwatching service was working and being brought to greater efficiency.

A nucleus minesweeping fleet was in being and in process of expansion; and boom defences to safeguard against torpedo and submarine attack were being erected at Fremantle and Darwin. These had first been envisaged in 1937 when, as a result of a visit to Australia by an Admiralty specialist, the designs for the Fremantle and Darwin defences were undertaken by the Admiralty, who also undertook the training in Boom Defence of an officer of the R.A.N., Lieut-Commander Thurlby.⁸ The Naval Board proceeded with the building of two boom working vessels, *Kookaburra*⁹ and *Koala*,¹ which were completed respectively in early 1939 and 1940, a third and fourth vessel, *Kangaroo* and *Karangi*,² being ordered in those years. The Boom Defence Service was organised, as from April 1939, under the Director of Ordnance, Torpedoes and Mines, Commander Spooner,³ who was responsible to the Naval Board, with Thurlby as his adviser and Officer Commanding Boom Defence Service. By June 1940 preliminary work at both Fremantle and Darwin was under way. The manufacture, for the first time in Australia, of wire rope had begun at Newcastle, New South Wales, early in 1939, together with that of nets for the boom defences.

An important step had been taken with the War Cabinet's approval, on the 21st May 1940—the construction of a large graving dock in Sydney. As stated in Chapter 1, Sir Leopold Savile, the English consultant engaged by the Commonwealth Government, arrived in Australia in June 1939. His report drawn up on his return to England after inspecting various proposed sites in Australia between June and August 1939 was received in Australia in March 1940, and recommended the construction of a graving dock on a site in Sydney Harbour between Garden Island and Potts Point; the dock to be 1,050 feet in length, by 137 feet in width and 45 feet deep. These dimensions, on advice from the Admiralty, were subsequently increased as to length and width by forty feet and ten feet six inches respectively. By Cabinet's acceptance of the Savile recommendation, and decision to proceed with the work, Australia was thus set on the road to possessing in Sydney a major naval base.

⁸ Cdr W. H. Thurlby, RAN. (HMS *Agincourt* 1918.) Officer in charge, Boom Defence Service 1940; Director of Boom Defences 1942. Of Daylesford, Vic; b. Dandenong, Vic, 4 Jan 1900.

⁹ HMAS *Kookaburra* (1939), 533 tons, one 3-in AA gun, 9.5 kts.

¹ HMAS's *Koala* and *Kangaroo* (1940), 730 tons, one 3-in AA gun, 11.5 kts.

² HMAS *Karangi* (1941), 773 tons, one 3-in AA gun, 11.5 kts.

³ Capt L. A. W. Spooner, OBE; RN. Served RN 1900-31 (HMS's *Abercrombie* 1915-17, *Caledon* 1917-19), and RAN 1931-46. Of Beaumaris, Vic; b. Reading, Eng, 18 Apr 1885.

In January 1939 the Naval Board had ordered two "Tribal" class destroyers, *Arunta* and *Warramunga*,⁴ and both were on the stocks at Cockatoo Island dockyard at 30th June 1940. In addition, a building program of seventeen anti-submarine minesweeping vessels (corvettes) had been approved, ten of which were on Admiralty account and seven for the R.A.N. Of these, thirteen were on order at the 30th June 1940 and the keels of five had been laid. The sloop *Warrego*, launched at Cockatoo Island on 10th February 1940, was nearing completion. The shipbuilding program necessitated the use of shipyards other than Cockatoo Island—to which naval shipbuilding had been confined between the wars—and the hammering of rivets and clatter of steel now awoke the echoes in widely-spaced centres as yards came into operation from Maryborough in Queensland round to Whyalla in South Australia. Considerable work had been carried out also in the conversion of merchant vessels for naval purposes, and the defensive arming and equipping of merchant ships. By the end of June 1940 five passenger liners had been converted to armed merchant cruisers; 157 merchant vessels had been defensively equipped; 18 had been adapted for auxiliary naval service such as minesweeping; and 19 had been degaussed, in Australian shipyards.

At the outbreak of war the strength of the permanent force of the R.A.N. was 5,440 officers and men, a number which was immediately increased to 10,259 by the mobilisation of the various classes of reserves. By 30th June a further 2,914 officers and men had been entered. Among these were officers and ratings entered for special anti-submarine training, a school for which had been established at Sydney in February 1939, under the command of Acting Commander Newcomb,⁵ and a number of the graduates from this school proceeded directly overseas to serve with the Royal Navy. In addition to this, and other naval training, Merchant Navy Defence Courses, which had been inaugurated in 1938, were continued at Melbourne, Sydney, Fremantle, Newcastle, Brisbane, and Adelaide. These courses, designed to instruct merchant service masters and navigating officers in the general organisation of trade protection and the steps needed to ensure the maximum fighting efficiency of a defensively equipped merchant ship when attacked, were held at the Naval Reserve depots, whose staffs provided the instructors.

Thus, with the intimation by the Hauraki Gulf mines that the naval war had come to the Australia Station, and with Australian naval defence taking shape in its various phases to meet what eventualities lay ahead, ended the first ten months of war with Germany. They were ten months in which much had been done to put naval defence on a war footing, but months in which Australia had good reason to congratulate herself that a powerful naval enemy did not lie closer at hand.

⁴ HMAS *Warramunga*, destroyer (1942), 1,870 tons, eight 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36.5 kts.

⁵ Capt H. M. Newcomb; RN. (HMS *Centurion* 1918.) Comd HMAS *Rushcutter*, and officer in charge Anti-Submarine and RDF Schools 1938-47. Of Bedford, Eng, and Caulfield, Vic; b. Kidderminster, Eng, 18 Sep 1899.

As it was, because of the comparative immunity from attack bestowed upon her by ocean distances, Australia was allowed a period in which to prepare for a possible aggressor nearer home; and, with the assumption of some risk, to send her ships overseas to strengthen the forces of the Royal Navy where pressure was heavier. By the end of June 1940 eleven of the existing sixteen combat units of the Australian Navy had been released by the Commonwealth Government for this service. The strength thus made available to help in the general war effort was greater than the numbers indicate, since the two 8-inch gun cruisers; two of the three modern 6-inch gun vessels; the entire destroyer strength; one of the two armed merchant cruisers; and the latest of the three sloops; had been placed at the Admiralty's disposal.

Remaining on the Australia Station were *Perth*, *Manoora*, *Swan*, and *Yarra*, in eastern waters, and *Adelaide*, operating as Western Force cruiser, based on Fremantle.

CHAPTER 4

R.A.N. SHIPS OVERSEAS TO JUNE 1940

DURING the first ten months of the war, those Australian ships not retained on the home station were employed in Imperial dispositions in widely separated areas. The first six months found *Perth* in Central American waters, mainly engaged in the dual task of protecting trade—especially the important tanker traffic in the Caribbean—and preventing the escape of German merchant ships sheltering in neutral ports of the islands and the Isthmus. Last of the three expansion-program cruisers acquired from Britain, she had commissioned at Portsmouth on the 29th June 1939 as H.M.A. Ship under “Fighting Freddie” Farncomb, a studious, coolly-efficient officer whose nickname, bestowed during the war, reflected the confidence and esteem of the lower deck.

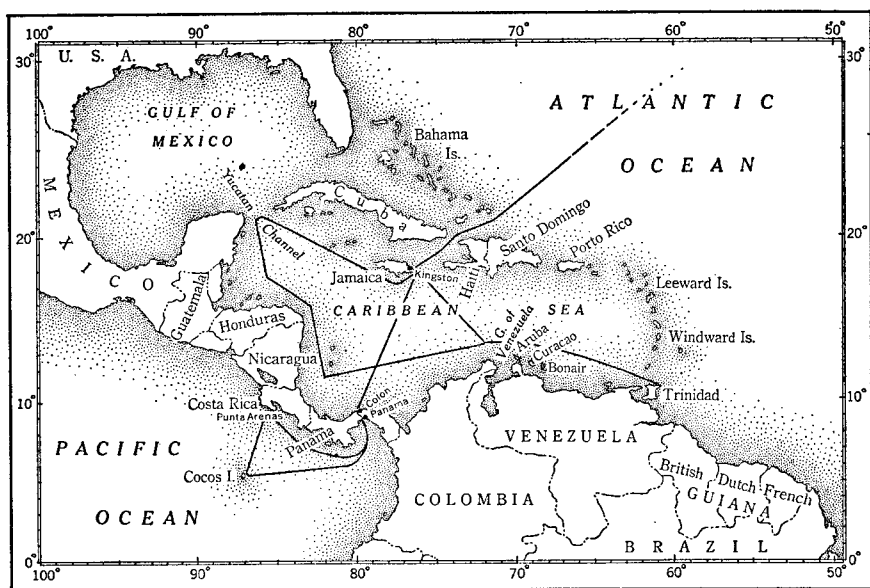
Perth sailed from Portsmouth on the 26th July for Australia via the Panama Canal, and reached New York, where she represented Australia at the World Fair, on the 4th August. On the 21st of the month, after twelve days of American hospitality, she arrived at Kingston, Jamaica, and was to have sailed for Panama on the 23rd, but in the early morning of that date Farncomb received a signal sent to the Admiralty by the Commander-in-Chief, America and West Indies—Vice-Admiral Meyrick¹—asking that *Perth* might remain on the station. Farncomb thereupon cancelled his sailing arrangements, thus anticipating an Admiralty signal received later in the day directing him to “return Kingston and await further orders”. The following day he was informed that the Australian Government agreed to *Perth’s* retention on the station, and was directed to assume the duties of Oil Fuel Protective Force, guarding the tanker traffic in the area between Trinidad and the Gulf of Venezuela.

Farncomb received news of the outbreak of war at 5.30 a.m. on the 3rd September, when *Perth* was off Willemstad Harbour, Curacao. She was then the only British warship in the South Caribbean, and, in the absence of reliable intelligence as to the whereabouts of German merchant ships, of which a number was reported as equipped for raiding, Farncomb considered his first duty was to endeavour to find them and prevent their escape. His tactics were to move rapidly at night, and appear off the widely scattered neutral ports in the morning in order to give the impression that more than one ship was in the area, a dummy third funnel being shipped on occasion to further this deception. On the 6th September Farncomb assumed command of the Oil Fuel Protective Force—to which the French submarine *Surcouf*² was attached—and spent the month of September patrolling the Southern Caribbean from the Yucatan Channel in the north-west to Trinidad at the south-eastern extreme.

¹ Admiral Sir Sidney Meyrick, KCB; RN. FOC 2nd Cruiser Sqn 1934-36; C-in-C American and West Indies Stn 1937-40. B. 28 Mar 1879.

² *Surcouf*, French submarine (1932), 2,880 tons, two 8-in. guns, ten 21.7-in torp tubes, 18 kts. World’s largest submarine; lost 19 Feb 1942.

Throughout October *Perth* was in the Atlantic Ocean. She left Kingston on the 4th as escort to the largest convoy—KJ.3, of forty-five ships—so far to leave that port, and in company with HMS *Berwick*,³ accompanied the convoy about halfway towards the United Kingdom, handing over to HMS *Effingham*⁴ in 39 degrees 58 minutes north, 46 degrees 43 minutes west; whence she proceeded to Bermuda, suffering minor damage from high seas during a hurricane on passage. In the evening of the 24th October, when on Atlantic patrol in 42 degrees 25 minutes north, 43 degrees 8 minutes west, she intercepted signals from a German warship—probably *Deutschland*, which was then in the area—went to action stations



and altered course towards; but she failed to establish contact and proceeded to Bermuda via Halifax, Nova Scotia, subsequently returning to the Caribbean and reaching Kingston on the 9th November. The second half of this month was spent in the Pacific. *Perth* passed through the Panama Canal on the 22nd, and reached Cocos Island, where she fuelled the Canadian destroyers *Ottawa*⁵ and *Restigouche*,⁶ on the 25th. After inspecting the western coast of the Isthmus, and observing the German merchant ships *Eisenach* (4,177 tons) and *Weser* (9,179 tons) in Punta Arenas, she made the return passage of the Canal on the 29th, and reached Kingston on the 1st December.

³ HMS *Berwick*, cruiser (1928), 10,000 tons, eight 8-in guns, 31.5 kts.

⁴ HMS *Effingham*, cruiser (1925), 9,550 tons, seven 7.5-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 29.5 kts; wrecked off Norway, 18 May 1940.

⁵ HMCS *Ottawa* (ex *Crusader*), destroyer (1932), 1,375 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk by enemy submarine, Gulf of St Lawrence, 14 Sep 1942.

⁶ HMCS *Restigouche* (ex *Comet*), destroyer (1932), 1,375 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

That month, January and February, were spent patrolling the South Caribbean, attracting, at times, the close attention of United States naval units. For two to three days in mid-December, while patrolling the Yucatan Channel in the hope of intercepting the German *Columbus* (32,581 tons) if that ship broke from Vera Cruz, *Perth* was closely shadowed by U.S. Ships *Vincennes*,⁷ *Evans*,⁸ and *Twiggs*,⁹ who persistently asked her name by signal and received the equally persistent reply "British warship" from Farncomb, who recorded his views in a slightly irritated "Queer ideas of 'neutrality' these Americans have!"

Fortune was against *Perth* so far as the interception of German ships was concerned. *Columbus* fell a victim to H.M.S. *Hyperion*¹ north-west of Bermuda; *Consul Horn* (8,384 tons), another escapee, reached Norwegian waters safely; and on the night of 29th February, the date of *Perth's* final departure from Kingston for Australia, *Troja* (2,390 tons) and *Heidelberg* (6,530 tons), which Farncomb had watched closely for some months, made a break to sea. Farncomb heard the news of their interception and scuttling on the 1st March, while on passage to Colon in company with H.M.S. *Diomedé*. "Much disappointment," he wrote, "is felt that the German merchant ships in Curacao and Aruba, which *Perth* had been watching for some time, commenced to leave on the night *Perth* and *Diomedé* left Kingston. Therefore denied the opportunity of making some captures, these falling to the lot of *Dunedin* and *Despatch*,² our reliefs."

But *Perth* had performed a useful function, and had done much hard work and hard steaming. Of the 120 days of war up to the 31st December 1939, she was under way on 99, a period exceeded by only one other cruiser, H.M.S. *Orion*,³ with 102 days at sea. When she passed through the Panama Canal on the 2nd March, homeward bound, she carried an appreciation of her services from the Commander-in-Chief, America and West Indies, in his signal:

I would like to take this opportunity before you leave the Station of informing you and your officers and men the pleasure it has been to me to have had a ship of the R.A.N. under my command. I thank you for the cooperation and for the help you have given me during the last six months. I wish you all the best of good fortune in the future.

It was the first of a number of similar signals Australian ships were to receive from flag officers of the Royal Navy during the war.

II

Some thousands of miles to the eastward, and also on sunny seas, *Hobart*—Captain Howden—was employed on similar missions in the Indian

⁷ *Vincennes*, US cruiser (1937), 9,400 tons, nine 8-in guns, 32 kts; sunk in night action with Jap surface forces off Savo I, 8-9 Aug 1942.

⁸ *Evans*, US destroyer (1918), 1,090 tons, four 4-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 35 kts.

⁹ *Twiggs*, US destroyer (1919), 1,090 tons, four 4-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 35 kts.

¹ HMS *Hyperion*, destroyer (1936), 1,340 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk off Pantelleria Island, 22 Dec 1940.

² HMS's *Diomedé* and *Despatch*, cruisers (1922), 4,850 tons, six 6-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 29 kts.

³ HMS *Orion*, cruiser (1934), 7,215 tons, eight 6-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 32.5 kts.

Ocean. She had sailed from Sydney on the 13th October and reached Singapore—where she suffered some days quarantine owing to an epidemic of mumps on board—on the 26th. Throughout November and most of December she was engaged on patrol and escort duties, mainly in the Bombay-Gulf of Aden area. From the 25th December to the 10th January 1940, she was with the French cruiser *Suffren* and sloop *Savorgnan de Brazza*,⁴ constituting Force "M", whose mission was to search for and destroy enemy raiders and supply ships, and protect trade routes at focal points. The force escorted a French troop convoy from Achin Head to Colombo and on to the Gulf of Aden, and *Hobart* returned to Colombo on the 10th January, and from the 13th until the end of the month was with Force "I"—*Cornwall*, *Dorsetshire*, and *Eagle*, under the command of Rear-Admiral Murray in *Cornwall*—based on Ceylon. During the first half of February she assisted in the escort of convoy US.1 between Colombo and the Red Sea, arriving at Colombo on the 22nd, where she was in dry dock from the 25th to the 29th. Throughout March and early April she was based on Ceylon. It was the period of the reinforcement of the Mediterranean Fleet, and she escorted *Aphis*⁵ and *Ladybird*,⁶ and ships of the 2nd Minesweeping Flotilla, over part of their Indian Ocean passage from the Far East; and from the 18th to the 20th of March she was the flagship of the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, Vice-Admiral Ralph Leatham.

During May and June 1939, a Franco-British inter-service conference at Aden had considered the naval problem which would arise in waters bordering on Italian East Africa in the event of war with Italy. It had been assumed that at the outset of such a war the passage of Allied ships through the Mediterranean would be stopped, and that supplies and reinforcements for the Allied forces operating in and round the eastern basin of the Mediterranean would have to pass through the Red Sea. The use of the Red Sea route, including the Gulfs of Aden and Suez, would therefore be a vital requirement; together with the ability to supply and reinforce Aden and Jibuti as desired or, if necessary, to withdraw the French from Jibuti and the British from Somaliland.

Italian naval and air forces in East Africa were well placed to attack the Red Sea route, and the British naval plan envisaged offensive and defensive action to counter the threat; offence by attack on bases in Eritrea and Italian Somaliland; the disposal of naval forces off these coasts and in the entrance to the Red Sea to deny the enemy supplies and reinforcements and to bring to action any of his forces encountered; the institution of contraband control, and a blockade of Italian Somaliland: defence by the escort of ships in convoy; the maintenance of patrols in the Gulf of Aden and the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb to contain enemy forces in the Red Sea and protect Aden from attack by surface vessels; and protective measures against mines.

⁴ *Savorgnan de Brazza*, French sloop (1932), 1,969 tons, three 5.5-in guns, 15.5 kts.

⁵ HMS *Aphis*, gunboat (1915), 625 tons, two 6-in guns, 14 kts.

⁶ HMS *Ladybird*, gunboat (1916), 625 tons, two 6-in guns, 14 kts; sunk in action with enemy aircraft off Libyan coast, 12 May 1941.

Reinforcement of the naval forces in the area was necessary to carry out this plan, and in April 1940, with the likelihood of war apparent, a Red Sea Force, initially composed of HMS *Liverpool* and *Hobart*, was formed, under the command of Rear-Admiral Murray in *Liverpool*.

Hobart sailed from Colombo on the 13th April and, intercepting the Danish merchant ship *Afrika* (8,597 tons) en route and sending her to Colombo under armed guard, reached Aden on the 18th. A week later she sailed on a diplomatic visit to the Red Sea ports of Kamaran, Hodeida and Mocha, returning to Aden on the 29th. May was spent in the Gulf of Aden and southern Red Sea, and on the 12th she for a few hours formed part of the escort of US.2. From the 15th to the 17th of the month she was at Berbera, covering and superintending the disembarkation of a battalion of the 2nd King's African Rifles, from the transport *Karanja* (9,891 tons). For the rest of the month, and in early June, she patrolled, and covered shipping in the Gulf of Aden, the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, and the southern Red Sea. It was while on this duty that her ship's company had the opportunity to size up a prospective enemy when she closed and identified the Italian destroyer *Vincenzo Orsini*⁷ on the 3rd June. A week later, at 6.38 p.m. on the 10th, *Hobart* was in Aden when Howden received the signal to commence hostilities against Italy that night.

III

H.M.A.S. *Sydney*—Captain Collins—which had relieved *Perth* overseas, but had been allocated by the Admiralty to the East Indies Station instead of the America and West Indies, had arrived at Colombo, to come under the command of Vice-Admiral Leatham, on the 8th May. It was intended that she should form part of the Indian Ocean escort of US.3, and she sailed from Colombo on the 12th to rendezvous with the convoy in the vicinity of Cocos Island; but the reinforcement of the Mediterranean led to her recall to proceed instead to that station. She reached Colombo again on the 18th, fuelled, and sailed the following day at "best speed" for Aden—cutting a whale in half with her starboard propeller on the morning of her departure. Aden was reached on the 22nd. These were pleasant days of war. The ship steamed swiftly over tropic seas, and permission was given to her company to reduce dress during daylight to a minimum of shorts and shoes to suit the climate. The day's activity began half-an-hour before dawn, when all hands turned out and stood to at dawn action stations. With the exception of the duty cruising watch, the forenoon was devoted to general maintenance work, and in the afternoon no work was done other than that necessary to keep the ship in a state of preparedness, and all hands off watch were piped down and left free, to sleep somewhere in the shade or otherwise pass the time. There followed evening quarters, after which an hour or two of recreation and exercise at hockey, tennis, boxing or wrestling, until supper; and, after dark, perhaps a singsong on the upper deck round the band, with the

⁷ *Vincenzo Orsini*, Italian destroyer (1916), 669 tons, six 4-in guns, four 18-in torp tubes, 30 kts; scuttled off Eritrean coast, April 1941.

strains of *Roll out the Barrel* rising above the roar of the blowers and song of the speeding turbines.⁸

Having embarked fuel and provisions, *Sydney* sailed from Aden on the 23rd in company with *Gloucester* and *Eagle*, and for a few hours in the evening had *Hobart* also in company. "This meeting," recorded Collins, "aroused considerable enthusiasm in the ship, and greetings were exchanged by signal. Both ships hoisted the Australian ensign at the fore for a few minutes." Passage of the Suez Canal was made during the night of the 25th-26th May, and at 3.30 p.m. on the 26th *Sydney* arrived at Alexandria and joined the 7th Cruiser Squadron—*Orion*, *Neptune*,⁹ *Gloucester*, and *Liverpool*—under the command of Vice-Admiral Light Forces, Vice-Admiral Tovey in *Orion*.

For the rest of May, and the early days of June, *Sydney* remained based on Alexandria, exercising with the squadron and generally shaking down. From the 1st June, anti-aircraft readiness was assumed at dawn and dusk, presaging the approaching storm. Nor was another wartime indication wanting. "A system of rationing," Collins wrote at the time, "has been introduced into the Fleet with a meagre allowance of meat by Australian standards. Arrangements are in hand to enable *Sydney* to draw a larger proportion in order not to cause a too drastic reduction in the standard of messing." It was an example of that difference in diet that caused the Australian sailors to nickname their English opposite numbers "Kippers".

When hostilities against Italy commenced at one minute past midnight on the 10th June, *Sydney* was in Alexandria Harbour, ready for sea.

IV

Sydney was not the only Australian ship in the Mediterranean when war with Italy broke out. The five destroyers, reunited after varied experiences on the passage from Australia, were also on the station. They had sailed from their home waters, *Stuart*, *Vendetta* and *Waterhen* from Sydney and *Voyager* and *Vampire* from Fremantle, in October 1939, and the two groups met at Singapore, whence they sailed in company for Colombo, under Waller as Commander (D) in *Stuart*, on the 13th November. They were not together for long. On the 15th *Vendetta*, whose medical officer had developed acute appendicitis, was detached for Penang. That same day *Graf Spee*, away to the westward, sank *Africa Shell* off Delagoa Bay, and Waller's flotilla was caught up in the dispositions made by Admiral Leatham to meet this raider threat in the Indian Ocean. On the 17th *Vampire* and *Voyager* were detached to Trincomalee to join Force "J"—*Kent* and *Suffren*—to operate in the Nicobar Islands. *Stuart* and *Waterhen* continued on to Colombo, where they arrived on the 18th, being joined by *Vendetta* the following day; and here the remainder of the flotilla was again split up, *Waterhen* being attached to Force "I", and *Vendetta* pro-

⁸ W. H. Ross, *Stormy Petrel* (1945), pp. 103-4. (Lt-Cdr W. H. Ross, RAN. HMAS's *Sydney* 1935-41, *Canberra* 1941-42. Of Ascot, Qld; b. Wellington, NSW, 22 Jan 1916.)

⁹ HMS *Neptune*, cruiser (1934), 7,175 tons, eight 6-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 32.5 kts: sunk by mine off Tripoli, Libya, 19 Dec 1941.

ceeding on anti-submarine patrol off Colombo; while on the 25th November *Stuart* sailed alone for Madagascar to join Force "K"—*Gloucester*, and the French *Rigault de Genouilly*—operating in that area.

Her voyage of some two thousand miles, made at economical speed over equatorial waters, blue and smooth, took seven days. For the most part she had the wide circle of sea to herself, when only "an occasional bird swooped overhead, feathers glinting in the sunlight, and men scorched in the sun on deck or dripped sweat from their semi-naked bodies below decks",¹ and the duty watch were at cruising stations. But the thought of a possible meeting with the raider was never far absent, and there were occasions when the alarm bells pealed and the ship's company raced to action stations, as when she met a ship one dark night, which turned out, however, to be a lawfully-engaged Japanese merchant vessel. An even more important matter for discussion on the mess decks was the food question. Fresh water was a problem, as the sentry on the upper deck pump indicated, and the rapid exhaustion of fresh provisions, due to limited storage space, soon reduced the menu to variations on the theme of bully beef and tinned salmon, with "hard tack" in lieu of bread. There was food for thought in all this for the reserve ratings who made up a large proportion of the destroyers' companies. A few weeks earlier they had been in civilian jobs ashore; now they were afloat for service in any seas, and many of them, under the impression that Naval Reserve conditions were in line with those of the militia, had not realised that they were liable for such service. While on passage from Australia to Singapore, Waller had informed the Naval Board that many reserve ratings in the flotilla claimed that they had joined for service in Australian waters only, and he requested a ruling. Actually there was no question as to their liability. The *Naval Defence Act* of 1910 provided that members of the Naval Forces might be required to serve for training or any naval service either within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth, "Naval Forces" including the Reserves.

The matter had been discussed in some detail during the debate on the Defence Bill in the House of Representatives on the 16th June 1939. That bill provided for the inclusion of the Australian Territories as areas in which members of the Australian Military Forces might be compelled to serve. Mr Maurice Blackburn, Labour member for Bourke, Victoria, moved an amendment that no inhabitant of Australia should be required to serve beyond the limits of Australia, nor inhabitant of the Territory to serve beyond the limits of the Territory—unless he voluntarily agreed to do so. This brought from the Minister for Defence, Brigadier Street, an objection that the proposed amendment would mean that no member of the naval forces need serve beyond the three-mile limit. Mr Blackburn replied:

The military reserve forces include all those called upon to serve under section 59 [of the *Defence Act*] who are not already members of the active forces. The citizen naval forces, by section 21 of the *Naval Defence Act*, are divided into naval reserve

¹ L. E. Clifford, *The Leader of the Crocks* (1945), p. 40.

forces and naval volunteer reserve forces. The naval forces do not include those covered by section 59 of the Act. The only persons affected by compulsion in the case of the Navy are those subject to compulsory training under section 12. The naval forces are raised, and kept at strength, by voluntary enlistment. That being so, the point made by the Minister simply comes to nothing, because no one can be compelled to join the Navy. A person may be compelled to render service upon land, but he cannot be compelled to render naval service unless he happens to be one of the compulsory trainees, in which case he is in the reserves. If he renders naval service he does so voluntarily. Section 59 of the *Defence Act*, which is the authority for calling them up, does not enable the Commonwealth to draft persons so called up into the Navy. Consequently, any one who enters the Navy does so of his own free will; if he joins the Navy for service overseas he does so voluntarily.²

Simply expressed, this meant that while a person could be called up for compulsory military training, he could not be called up specifically for naval training. But having been called up he could express a preference for naval training. If accepted for naval training he then, as a naval reservist, automatically volunteered for service in the navy anywhere in the world. But a reserve rating could, unless the position were explained to him, be unaware that by changing over from the militia to the naval reserves he had changed his militia status as regards liability for overseas service; and undoubtedly there was some laxity on the part of the naval recruiting authorities in not making clear to reserve recruits the liability for such service incurred by them. That it should have been necessary for Waller to seek a Naval Board ruling indicates that insufficient attention had been paid to this important matter.

The question was resolved for the destroyer reservists, and under the sympathetic and inspiring leadership which Waller exercised over his own ship and the flotilla, the matter of liability for overseas service was soon lost in the team spirit which inspired the five ships' companies,³ and within less than six months the description "the most lively and undefeated fellows I have ever had to do with" was applied to the destroyer crews by Admiral Cunningham.

The same misapprehension about foreign service existed among reserve ratings in the three Royal Navy armed merchant cruisers which, manned largely by Australian reservists, left Australia in the early days of the war. Captain Getting,⁴ in *Kanimbla*, commented at length in his reports of proceedings on the "Back to Australia" atmosphere which existed among the reservists in his ship's company owing to the impression held among them that they had joined for home service only; and he remarked: "I have had to correct this impression in quite certain terms." *Kanimbla*, at this period, was not a happy ship.

Stuart reached Diego Suarez, Madagascar, hungry for fresh provisions, on the 2nd December. Calls were exchanged with the Marine Commandant and the Commanding Officer of *Rigault de Genouilly*, which was in port;

² *Commonwealth Debates*, Vol 160, 1939, p. 2119.

³ "If we wish to skate," wrote an ex-destroyer rating in a letter commenting on the loss of Waller in *Perth* some two years later, "we say 'I was with Hec. Waller in the Med.'"

⁴ Capt F. E. Getting, RAN. (HMS *Glorious*, 1917.) Comd HMS *Kanimbla* 1939-41; Deputy CNS 1941-42; comd HMAS *Canberra* 1942. Of Manly, NSW; b. Manly, 30 Jul 1899. Died of wounds at Battle of Savo I, 9 Aug 1942.

but though the sloop's captain was helpful the French authorities were less so, and after forty-eight hours—it having become known that *Graf Spee* had left the Indian Ocean, so that hunting groups there could be redispersed—*Stuart* sailed for the Mediterranean, lacking five days' fresh provisions which had been ordered on her arrival. Relief came after two days at sea, when a suspicious steamer, which failed to answer signals or heave to when challenged, was brought to with a shotted round, and boarded. She turned out to be the tanker *British Chivalry* (7,118 tons), bound from the Cape to the Persian Gulf, whose master had mistaken *Stuart* for an enemy warship and was gaining time to destroy confidential books. Apprised of *Stuart's* plight, she acted up to her name, and Waller recorded that "a much needed supply of provisions was obtained and transferred in the boarding boat".

Aden was reached on the 10th December, and five days later *Stuart* entered the Mediterranean, proceeding to Malta, where she arrived on the 17th. Meanwhile the other ships of the flotilla had been released from the Indian Ocean hunting groups and had also proceeded to the Mediterranean. *Vendetta* and *Waterhen* anticipated *Stuart's* arrival at Malta by three days, and *Vampire* and *Voyager* reached the island on the 24th December.

The Mediterranean Fleet had been reduced to a minimum at this period, and on their arrival the Australians were told by Tovey that it included little more than the five destroyers, and that there was plenty of hard work ahead with many long days at sea. In this he was a true prophet. The ships settled down to a prolonged course of escort and patrol work which employed them, singly and in pairs, from one end to the other of the Mediterranean. *Stuart* on one occasion went as far north as Finisterre in a brief essay into the Atlantic on the screen of the carrier *Glorious*. Gibraltar, Marseilles, Malta, Haifa, Port Said, Alexandria, and the seas separating these ports, became familiar to the ships' companies, but the weather caused nostalgic yearnings for the Indian Ocean days. The change from the heat and smooth waters of the tropics to the cold and high seas at times experienced in the Mediterranean winter was sudden. As often as not the passages between ports were made slamming into heavy weather, when green water cascaded over the forecastles and the ships dived and corkscrewed in a way that made life on board anything but comfortable. On the sea-swept upper decks, lifelines were rigged; and sea boots, oilskins, and sou'westers replaced the shorts and shoes of sunnier latitudes; while down below, the mess decks, awash with swirling water, were a chaos of floating clothing and gear which had come adrift with the violent plunging. "I always count those early months in the Med. before Italy came in," said a *Stuart* rating in later years, "as the worst period of the war by a long chalk." But the weather was not all bad, and there were some compensating periods in port during boiler cleans and refits, which offered relaxation and sightseeing in novel surroundings, and a change of diet. "Big eats in here, Jack," was a stock hail from the women canvassing patronage for the cafés in Malta's Strada Stretta—"The

Gut", as the sailors knew it; and Waller, who gave a talk on winter service conditions in the Mediterranean, and the most needed forms of woollen garments, to a large gathering of Haifa women eager to knit comforts for the Fleet, wrote of the generous hospitality of the residents of that city, and their excellent treatment of the officers and men of the flotilla.

Stuart had the greatest variety of employment. She carried out a secret mission entailing the transfer at sea to another vessel of Special Service men and equipment for operations in enemy European territory; throughout a stormy day of high seas and fog her ship's company battled to get a line by whaler to the disabled British tanker *Trocas* (7,406 tons), eventually taking her in tow with a bow line from *Stuart*, who towed stern first until a tug arrived to take over; and she recovered the crew of *Neptune's* seaplane, which had force-landed on the sea, and towed the aircraft thirty miles through a sand-laden khamsin—the south-easterly wind which blows from the desert and reduces visibility to as low as fifty yards—to deliver it alongside the cruiser in Alexandria Harbour.

On the 27th May, the five Australian ships—the 19th Destroyer Division, as the group was known in the Mediterranean—were combined with the four ships of the 20th Destroyer Division, *Dainty*,⁵ *Diamond*,⁶ *Decoy* and *Defender*, to form the 10th Destroyer Flotilla under Waller, who, with his promotion the following month, became Captain (D) in *Stuart*. When Italy entered the war on the 10th June the ships of the flotilla, with the exception of *Vendetta* and *Dainty*, which were refitting at Malta, and *Diamond* temporarily operating from that base, were at Alexandria or operating therefrom.

V

Not H.M.A. Ships, but manned by the R.A.N. mainly with reserve officers and ratings, were the three armed merchant cruisers *Moreton Bay*, *Arawa*, and *Kanimbla*, which had left Australia to join the China Station—Admiral Sir Percy Noble, Commander-in-Chief—the first two in November, and *Kanimbla* in December 1939. Based on Hong Kong, they were employed on patrol with the primary object of intercepting German merchant ships which might sail from Japanese ports in which they had taken refuge. Of the three ships, *Kanimbla* was commanded by an officer of the R.A.N.—Getting—the others being commanded by officers of the R.N., *Moreton Bay* by Captain Haes⁷ and *Arawa* by Captain Deverell,⁸ both of whom had been in Australia on loan from the Admiralty.

The work of the three ships was to a large extent monotonous and often arduous, with long spells at sea in weather which, in the northern latitudes and season of the year, varied from bright, sunny and springlike,

⁵ HMS *Dainty*, destroyer (1932), 1,375 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk by enemy aircraft off Tobruk, 24 Feb 1941.

⁶ HMS *Diamond*, destroyer (1932), 1,375 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk by enemy aircraft in Gulf of Navplion, Greece, 27 Apr 1941.

⁷ Capt E. M. Haes, DSC; RN. (HMS's *Prince of Wales* 1914-17, *Ramillies* 1917-18.) Comd HMS's *Moreton Bay* 1939-40, *Egret* 1941-43; Dep C of S, Rosyth 1943-45. B. 27 Oct 1898.

⁸ Capt G. R. Deverell, RN. (HMS *Thunderer* 1918.) Comd HMS *Arawa* 1939-41, HMNZS *Monowd* 1941-43, HMS *Perseus* 1945. B. 19 Aug 1899.

to violent gales and snowstorms. *Kanimbla* sailed from Sydney on the 8th December 1939, and arrived at Hong Kong on the 3rd January 1940, after some days showing the flag in New Guinea waters. On the 20th January she sailed from Hong Kong on her first patrol off the Japanese coast south of Nagoya, where she was shadowed by Japanese aircraft. The day following *Kanimbla's* departure from Hong Kong, *Liverpool*, on patrol some fifty miles south of Yokohama, intercepted the Japanese merchant ship *Asama Maru*⁹ outward bound from that port, and removed from her thirteen German officers and eight men, all technicians, who were part of a general movement of German merchant service officers and men from America, who hoped to reach Germany via Siberia. The seized men were taken to Hong Kong and there interned. The incident, while it discouraged the attempted movement of German nationals of military age across the Pacific, caused violent reactions in Japan, where it was made into political capital by the Opposition in Parliament, and caused an anti-British outburst in the Press which played heavily on the fact that the interception took place within sight of Fuji Yama. The matter was magnified to the status of an insult to the Japanese people, and there were hostile demonstrations outside the British Embassy. After considerable negotiations and exchange of Notes the incident was settled, and on the 6th February Mr Chamberlain told the House of Commons that nine of the Germans, found upon investigation to be "relatively unsuitable for military service", would be handed over to the Japanese authorities, while the Japanese shipping companies had been instructed by their Government that they should in future refuse passage to any individual of a belligerent country "who is embodied in the armed forces or who is suspected of being so embodied". *Kanimbla* was assigned the task of returning the Germans to Japan.

The nine men were embarked at Hong Kong, and *Kanimbla*, still in her peacetime paint, sailed at noon on the 23rd February for Yokohama, anchoring off the port just before 8 a.m. six days later. Her stay there was short. Japanese representatives and the British naval attaché boarded the ship at 8.30, and the operation of handing over the prisoners of war was completed without any complications. "The Japanese Foreign Office representatives," Getting found, "were most helpful and amusing." The senior of the nine Germans, Captain Groth, a merchant seaman, remarked during the passage from Hong Kong that he considered the removal of the Germans from *Asama Maru* "an excellent piece of work, and an action which would deter the remainder of the German crews still in the United States, approximately 1,000 men, from making the passage". At 10.25 a.m., the operation completed, *Kanimbla* weighed and returned to patrol.

The remainder of the first ten months of the war was spent by the three armed merchant cruisers on the China Station, mostly patrolling off the coasts of Japan. During March *Kanimbla* intercepted the Russian

⁹ *Asama Maru*, Japanese steamer (1929), 16,975 tons, 19 kts; converted to troopship; sunk by US submarine *Atule* South China Sea, 1 Nov 1944.

merchant ship *V. Mayakovsky*,¹ to be taken to port and searched for contraband. For twelve days, from the 15th to the 27th of the month, she had the Russian under her charge in circumstances of considerable difficulty. A boarding party had been placed in the Russian ship, whose captain was quite amenable to being taken under *Kanimbla's* escort. But she was short of fuel, and on more than one occasion her engines broke down. *Kanimbla* fuelled her at sea, an operation hampered and curtailed by bad weather; and took her in tow for a period of the passage; and reached the vicinity of Hong Kong on the 27th March, where the Russian vessel was handed over to the French cruiser *Lamotte-Picquet*.² During April, with the German invasion of Norway, the three armed merchant cruisers intercepted various Norwegian ships on the China Station and sent them in to Hong Kong. Their main duties continued to be the prevention of the escape of German ships in Japan, and they were still engaged on this task when Italy entered the war in June.

¹ *V. Mayakovsky* (ex *Bela Khun*), Russian motor vessel (1929), 3,972 tons.

² *Lamotte-Picquet*, French cruiser (1926), 7,249 tons, eight 6.1-in guns, twelve 21.7-in torp tubes, 33 kts; sunk by US aircraft in Indo-Chinese waters, 12 Jan 1945.

CHAPTER 5

R.A.N. SHIPS OVERSEAS JUNE-DECEMBER 1940

THE name "Mediterranean" suggests the importance of the sea that bears it. Up to the last millennium B.C., it was the centre of the known world; a vast lake, washing the shores of three continents—Europe, Africa, and Asia—and both separating and linking the communities which grew and lived on its fringe. As such it became the main schoolhouse of navigation, of naval strategy, and naval tactics. On its surface, in the sea battles of the Persian, the Peloponnesian, and the Punic wars, the outcome of those wars was decided, and the fates of nations determined. With the expansion of the known world through exploration, the Mediterranean's importance was enhanced as a main route to the East and as a highway for the trade on which were built the mercantile republics of Genoa and Venice. Over its surface sailed the fleets of the Crusaders; it "has witnessed the clash of Christianity and Islam; and its waters have been dyed with the blood of Goth and Vandal, Arab and Norman". Not until the ocean routes to the Far East and the Americas were opened in the fifteenth century was its monopoly destroyed.

The largest of the world's inland seas, it is some two thousand nautical miles long, by six hundred wide at its greatest width between the heel of Italy and the southern shore of the Gulf of Sidra on the African coast. Its only oceanic opening is that at the western end to the Atlantic by the Straits of Gibraltar, 8 miles in width. At the eastern end it connects by the mile-wide passage of the Dardanelles with the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea. In the centre the forty-mile stretch of the Strait of Otranto between Italy and Albania gives access to the *cul-de-sac* of the Adriatic. It is thus almost landlocked; and, a sea of evaporation, with a constant current streaming in from the Atlantic on the one hand and the Black Sea on the other to replace wastage, is practically tideless. Over the greater area of its western and eastern basins it is of considerable depth, an average of some 1,500 fathoms, with a maximum of 2,400 fathoms in the eastern basin off Cape Matapan, the southern extremity of Greece. The shallowest portion, with maximum depths of a little over 200 fathoms, lies in the 80-mile passage connecting the two basins, between the western end of Sicily and Africa's Cape Bon.

Climatically it lies in a favoured area, with a preponderance of gentle winds and smooth seas; gales there are, though not of great duration, and the land barriers forbid the widespread and lasting oceanic wave disturbances. These conditions were indulgent to the birth of navigation, and there is evidence of a fully developed sea life four thousand years B.C. in the eastern basin. They are conditions, also, which affected the design of the ships which sailed its surface. The calm days and smooth seas, the near-by coasts and islands where shelter could be found, led to the oar becoming the chief instrument of navigation, and the galley with its ram



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Italian Motor Vessel *Romolo*, after interception
by H.M.A.S. *Manoora*, 12th June 1940.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Survivors from *Romolo* being taken on
board *Manoora*.



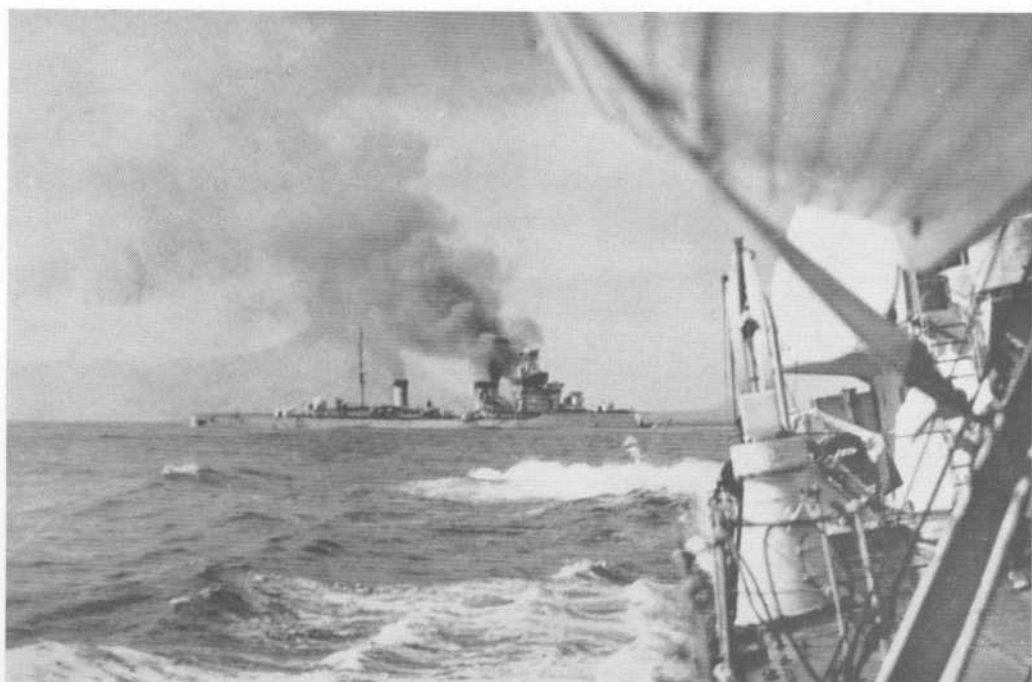
(Petty Officer G. A. Balshaw, R.A.N.)

Italian Submarine *Uebi Scebeli* sunk by H.M.S. *Dainty*, 29th June 1940.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

H.M.A.S. *Sydney* in Alexandria Harbour.



(Admiralty)

Italian Cruiser *Bartolomeo Colleoni* shattered and sinking, 19th July 1940.

the natural instrument of sea power.¹ This was a circumstance which was to have far-reaching effects. With the development of navigation on the northern Asiatic seaboard, conditions forced the oceanic seamen to develop types of vessels to meet the requirements set by higher winds and rougher seas. Sea worthiness and sailing qualities became of major importance. The oar-propelled fortress of the Mediterranean on which the soldier fought in the traditions of land warfare, gave place in the Atlantic to the oarless sailing vessel of extreme mobility and fighting power manned and fought by seamen; ships in which, as Drake said—marking an essential difference between south and north—"the gentleman must hale and draw with the mariner, and the mariner with the gentleman". The deficiencies of the Mediterranean ships and tactics outside that sea were manifested at the defeat of the Armada in 1588. To an extent they persisted through the era of the mechanically-propelled vessel; and both ships and men of the Mediterranean Italian Navy in the war of 1939-45 were to carry, even though faintly, the imprint of their environment.

As a highway to the East even before the opening of the Suez Canal; as a bridge between Europe and Africa; and as a gate through which European conquerors could burst their continental bonds to the south-east, the Mediterranean has long been a major interest to Britain. "The strategic conditions of the Mediterranean rest on its geographical conditions, and you can no more move the vital naval strategic spot elsewhere than you can move Mount Vesuvius," wrote Lord Fisher² at the beginning of the twentieth century, when France, a Mediterranean power, appeared as Britain's likely enemy. The force of this observation had been shown a hundred years earlier in the effect on Napoleon's eastern ambitions of the French defeat at Aboukir. It carried equal weight in the war of 1914-18 when the main enemy, Germany, though not a Mediterranean power, was held prisoner in Europe largely through British control of that sea. It lost nothing of its significance in the war of 1939-45, when Britain's ability to remain in the Mediterranean was challenged by the considerable fleet and air force of a Mediterranean power to whom sea communications were of first importance.

From the time of her rise towards world power in her challenge to Spain in the sixteenth century, it was inevitable that the geographical conditions of the Mediterranean should make it a naval strategical centre for Britain. Not only was Spain a Mediterranean power, but the growth of Mediterranean trade in which Holland, Britain's later rival, was also interested, made the sea of increasing importance; and when Blake pursued Prince Rupert through the Straits in 1651 the prestige accruing as the result of the presence there of her powerful naval force brought that importance home to Britain. A letter written at that time to Blake by

¹ The last great sea battle in which galleys decided the outcome was that of Lepanto, in 1571, when the combined fleets of Venice, Spain, and the Pope defeated the Turkish fleet, over 200 galleys being engaged on either side. But galleys survived in the Mediterranean well on into the era of steam. In the eighteenth century "the British Navy in the Mediterranean made considerable use of half-galleys, as they were called—vessels 120 feet long, with a beam of 18 feet, propelled by 40 oars and carrying five guns". F. C. Bowen, *The Sea, Its History and Romance* (1923), Vol. 2, p. 215.

² Admiral Bacon, *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone* (1929), Vol I, p. 170.

the British ambassador in Madrid, gives the key to a situation which persisted. "Your fleets meeting here," he wrote, "is of no less admiration to other foreign kingdoms (into which reports fly to them daily) than to Spain, who much admire your quickness in such strength and fresh supplies. So I believe in a short time the Spaniards, through fear and love, will grow respectful to us." The diplomatic value of British strength in the Mediterranean did not diminish over the succeeding centuries, and apart from other considerations was a major factor in deciding the presence there of a fleet for long regarded by the Admiralty as second only in importance to that in Home waters.

By her acquisition of Gibraltar under the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, Britain's influence in the Mediterranean was greatly enhanced. A rocky promontory of an area of some three square miles, with a height of 1,400 feet, it dominates the Straits from the northern shore, and, as a strongly fortified naval base gave a measure of control over them. The efficacy of this control was lessened with the advent of the submarine and the aircraft, but as a naval base Gibraltar remained of strategic value; strengthened by the fact that although the territory is a physical appendage of Spain, the native population had acquired markedly pro-British sentiments. The main visible threat to Gibraltar in 1939 lay in the possible attitude of Spain consequent upon an extension of the war with Germany. The Franco régime was indebted to both Germany and Italy for active military support during the civil war; and it was obvious that the greatest possible pressure would be brought upon the Spanish Government to bring Spain into the war on the side of the Axis. It was thought probable that the fortress—whose defences had been greatly strengthened—could hold out, but its value as a naval base would certainly be neutralised if Spain became an active enemy.

Little less than 1,000 miles to the eastward of Gibraltar, midway along the Mediterranean and in a commanding position in the narrows between Sicily and the African coast, lies the island of Malta. It fell to the British after Nelson's victory at Aboukir. In the Treaty of Paris in 1814, and at the request of the inhabitants, its retention by Britain was confirmed. As in the case of Gibraltar, the strategic value of Malta was weakened by the advent of the submarine and aeroplane, and especially by the latter, the island being less than 60 miles from Sicily. But unlike Gibraltar, Malta, of almost 100 square miles, had airfields permitting it to take counter action against a hostile air power. With deep and protected harbours it offered natural naval base potentialities which the British exploited, and until the building of the capital ship dock at Singapore it remained the farthest eastern capital ship base in British territory, and was for long the main base of the Mediterranean Fleet. Its native population, despite errors in British administration, and propaganda and political intervention by Fascist Italy, remained fundamentally pro-British, and in 1939 irredentism in the island was negligible and morale was high.

Napoleon's essay in Egypt at the end of the eighteenth century awakened Britain to the significance of the Eastern Mediterranean, an awareness

that was heightened by the establishment of steamboat services to Egypt from Britain and India, with an overland route that connected the Mediterranean and Red Sea Passages in the mid-nineteenth century; and which was further stimulated by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and Disraeli's purchase of the Khedive's shares in it six years later. From its inception, Britain had been the greatest user of the Canal. The Mediterranean route to the East and Australia became a "vital life line" to her, and the fate of Egypt of consequent concern, resulting in British occupation of that country at the time of the 1882 rebellion against the Khedive; an occupation which continued until the conclusion of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936. In 1939, under the terms of that treaty, Britain and Egypt were allies; Egypt recognised Britain's interest in the Suez Canal, with the right to keep a peacetime force of 10,000 men and 400 pilots in the Canal zone until the Egyptian Army was strong enough to take over its defence; the two countries were to give mutual aid in war, it being stipulated that Egypt's aid should consist in furnishing, on Egyptian territory, all the facilities and assistance in its power, including the use of Egyptian ports, aerodromes, and means of communication. Britain thus continued to enjoy the use of Alexandria as a naval base; with a safe and ample harbour, capable of reinforcement and supply through the Red Sea if necessary, and less subject than Malta to continuous and heavy air attack, it became the natural choice as the base of the Mediterranean Fleet in the war. In Egypt the problem of local population differed from that experienced in Malta and Gibraltar. The country was a sovereign State, strongly nationalistic; the people had long resented the presence of the British occupying forces; and opposition to the conclusion of a treaty had led to the Egyptian rejection of successive draft proposals from their first production by Britain in 1927. But Egypt received a fright when Italy invaded Abyssinia in 1935, and the 1936 Treaty was the result. It was efficient for its purpose, and to that extent satisfactory to both parties.

Britain had two other footholds in the Eastern Mediterranean, though neither was an established naval base. The conquest of Palestine from the Turks was achieved by Britain in 1917, and she was given a mandate over the country together with the task of creating there a home for the Jewish race. The resulting conflict between Jew and Arab led Britain to maintain troops in the country, but the terms of the mandate did not permit the conversion of Haifa—Palestine's premier port and third largest in the Eastern Mediterranean—into a naval base, although it possessed considerable potentialities and was a terminal of an oil pipe-line from Kirkuk, in Iraq. So far as the population was concerned, Britain's "Palestine Problem" had mounted in complexity in the years between the wars, and in 1939 was still unsolved. But in Palestine as in Egypt, the threat of a common danger, added to Britain's growing strength generally and in the Mediterranean, temporarily at any rate lessened the internal difficulties.

In the north-eastern corner of the Mediterranean lies the sea's third largest island, Cyprus, with an area of 3,584 square miles, strategically

situated overlooking surrounding territories; only 50 miles from Asia Minor, 60 from Syria, 140 from Haifa, and some 230 from Egypt to the south and the Dodecanese Islands to the west respectively. It possesses harbours capable of development, and areas suitable for aerodrome building. The climate is one of the healthiest in the Eastern Mediterranean. Cyprus came under British occupation and administration in 1878, under the terms of a convention concluded by the Disraeli Government with that of Turkey, Britain in return pledging to help to defend the Asiatic territories of the Ottoman Empire. Britain desired Cyprus to counter the Russian menace of the period, and as an outlying defence of the Suez Canal. But with the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, Cyprus became a strategical backwater. Britain retained the island on leasehold from Turkey until 1914, when she annexed it on Turkey's entering the first World War. It was made a Crown Colony in 1925. In 1939 Cyprus was a potential naval and military base, but nothing had been done to provide the facilities. Although the lot of the Cypriots had been considerably improved since the British took over in 1878, there had also been considerable British neglect adding to the discontent of the people over the financial arrangements arising from the Cyprus Tribute, which had its roots in the terms of the original convention. Of the population of some 350,000, approximately one-fifth were Turks and strongly pro-British; but the four-fifths majority were Greek, and longed to be under Greek administration; discontent at British rule manifested itself in riots in 1931, when Government House was burned down. This forced the British Government to a more active policy, both of temporary repression and progressive reform. But, again as was instanced in Egypt, what made the greatest improvement in British-Cypriot relations was Cypriot realisation, forced on them by the Abyssinian War, of the danger threatening from Italy. Greece, though attractive, was impotent; and unless they wanted to belong to Italy, they had better support Britain. As was written by a student of Mediterranean affairs in 1938: "At the Coronation review at Nicosia in 1937, a Union Jack on the bastion above the saluting troops was flying from a blue-and-white Greek flagpole. As an illustration of the present Cypriot state of mind, the symbol could not be bettered."³

Britain's communications through the Mediterranean in 1939 were thus supported by naval bases at Gibraltar, Malta, and Alexandria—of which Alexandria offered the greatest security—and by harbours in Palestine and Cyprus. Those communications were flanked by the metropolitan and African coastlines of her French ally, with powerful naval bases at Toulon in France, and at Oran, Mers el Kebir, Algiers, and Bizerta in North Africa. The rest of the Mediterranean coastline was neutral. The continued neutrality of Spain and Italy was in doubt, and any change in their status would affect Morocco in the west and Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and the Dodecanese Islands in the centre and east. The Italian occupation

³ Elizabeth Monroe, *The Mediterranean in Politics* (1938), p. 53. See also Kenneth Williams, *Britain and the Mediterranean* (1940), and Petrie, *Lords of the Inland Sea* (1937).

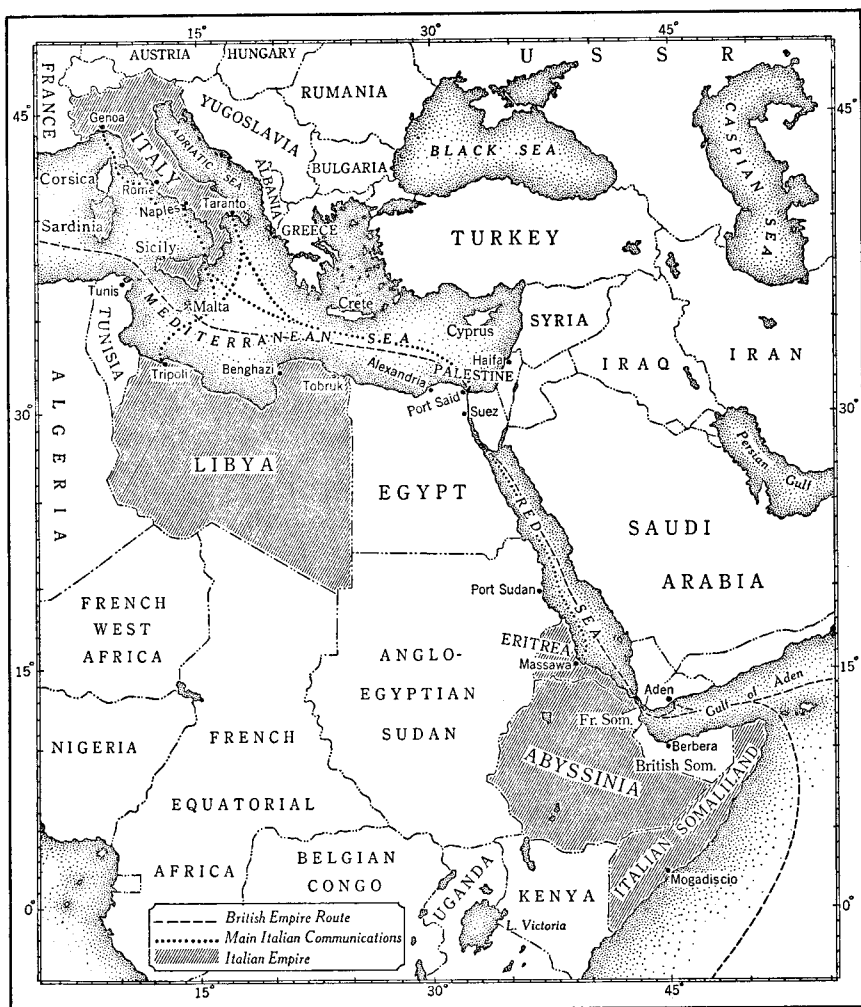
of Albania in April 1939 had effectively made the Adriatic an Italian lake in the Mediterranean. But Britain could rely upon at least the neutrality of Greece, to whom the British Government in April 1939 had given a guarantee of aid if attacked; and of Turkey, with whom it had concluded an alliance the following month.

II

The question of Britain's naval policy in the Mediterranean had been argued in the years between the wars, and in the light of experiences during the 1914-18 conflict and of post-war developments. During the 1914-18 war, though Turkey and Austria were hostile, Italy was an ally, and Britain had maintained control of the sea. Yet out of a total of 13,000,000 tons of British, Allied and neutral merchant ships lost by enemy action, some 5,000,000 tons were sunk in the Mediterranean, almost all by German submarines. This fact lent colour to Fascist claims that the sea was "created by God expressly for submarine warfare", and influenced a school of British thought, as did the consideration that attack from the air, negligible in the 1914-18 war, was now a major factor, not only adding to the hazards to be faced by ships, but reducing the value of Gibraltar and Malta as bases, if not actually neutralising Malta in the event of war with Italy. It was argued that in such a war the Mediterranean Fleet would face a powerful Italian navy—backed by numerous strong bases and supported by air power which would make the lot of surface ships hazardous in the extreme—at considerable disadvantage. This British "Cape School" of thought therefore considered that Britain should relinquish the Mediterranean in time of war, revert to the Cape route to the East for trade, and fight a naval war on the oceans, where there was room to manoeuvre and less danger of air attack; at the same time keeping the Italian Fleet out of the picture by preventing its egress from the Mediterranean. On the other hand a "Mediterranean School" held that such action by Britain would increase the likelihood of war in the Mediterranean by encouraging aggression there, and that in any event Britain was bound to defend Egypt and Palestine, where she had responsibilities that both honour and interest compelled her to meet.

Actually the value of the Mediterranean as a "vital life line" was far less to Britain than it was to Italy. Britain in an emergency could do without the Mediterranean as a through route. For her the Middle East, important because of her great financial interests therein, because of its vast oil resources, and by reason of its geographical situation as a strategic reserve of military power, was the vital area; and this she could reach by the longer haul round the Cape from the British Isles, and by the oceanic routes from India and the East, via the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. But to Italy the Mediterranean was the sole link with her African empire, and a major road for the carriage of essential imports. To give her undisputed use of the sea would be to strengthen her greatly, and confer upon her the boon of safe internal lines of communication with

North Africa; increasing the threat to Egypt, the Red Sea, and the whole fabric of British security in the Middle East; and at the same time removing a major obstacle to a German advance into the area through south-eastern Europe. The effect such a British retreat would have upon Britain's well-wishers and allies in the Eastern Mediterranean was apparent.



It had been made so in 1935 and 1936. Then Britain's weakness in the Mediterranean had led to her receiving no practical support during the Abyssinian war, and she had been the only country to move a ship or a man as a deterrent to Italy. But, though active support was not forthcoming then, the movement of those ships and men revived the hopes of weaker Mediterranean countries for the future. It was an echo down three

centuries of "your fleets meeting here" being of admiration to "foreign kingdoms into which reports fly to them daily". And it was shortly afterwards that the British Government resolved any doubts as to its intentions by stating unequivocally Britain's decision to remain in the Mediterranean in strength; and that the building up of that strength began.

III

For the first ten days after Italy entered the war in June 1940, the Mediterranean picture was not an unfavourable one for Britain and France. The coastline, except for that of Italy and her possessions—the Dodecanese, Tripolitania, and Cyrenaica—were Allied or neutral. Allied responsibility for the defence of the sea was shared mainly on a geographical basis, the French being responsible for the western basin, the British for the eastern. At Gibraltar a British patrol force of one aircraft carrier, *Argus*, and two cruisers and nine destroyers of the North Atlantic command, kept watch over the Straits. In the western basin the French Fleet comprised the battleships *Bretagne* and *Provence*; the battle cruisers *Dunkerque* and *Strasbourg*; four 8-inch gun cruisers of the *Algérie* class and six 6-inch gun ships of the *Marseillaise* class; twenty-seven destroyers, including six large vessels of the *Tigre* and *Le Fantasque* classes, which were in effect light cruisers; and thirty-two submarines. The main force, including the four capital ships, was based on Mers el Kebir, with lighter concentrations at Algiers, Bizerta, and Toulon. There was also a French force under Admiral Godfroy in the Eastern Mediterranean, consisting of the battleship *Lorraine*, the 8-inch gun cruisers *Suffren*, *Duquesne*, and *Tourville*, the 6-inch gun cruiser *Duguay-Trouin*; the destroyers *Le Fortuné*, *Forbin*, and *Basque*; and seven submarines. The British Mediterranean Fleet consisted of the battleships *Warspite*—wearing the flag of the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Cunningham—*Ramillies*, *Royal Sovereign*, and *Malaya*; nine cruisers, including *Gloucester*, *Liverpool*, *Orion*, *Neptune*, and *Sydney* of the 7th Cruiser Squadron; and the "C" class vessels of the 3rd Cruiser Squadron which was under the command of Rear-Admiral Renouf;⁴ the aircraft carrier *Eagle*; the monitor *Terror*; twenty-six destroyers, four of which were detached to the East Indies Station; twelve submarines; and various auxiliary vessels.⁵ The main fleet was based on Alexandria, only light forces being at Malta.

⁴ Vice-Adm E. de F. Renouf, CB, CVO; RN. Comd HMS *Sheffield* 1938-40, 3 Cruiser Sqn 1940-41. B. 1888.

⁵ *Bretagne*, *Provence* and *Lorraine*, French battleships (1915-16), 22,189 tons, ten 13.4-in and fourteen 5.5-in guns, 20 kts; *Bretagne* and *Provence* severely damaged at Oran by British shell fire, 3 Jul 1940; *Provence* refitted at Toulon, but again heavily damaged 27 Nov 1942.

Dunkerque and *Strasbourg*, French battleships (1937-38), 26,500 tons, eight 13-in and sixteen 5.1-in guns, 29.5 kts; severely damaged at Oran by British fire, 3 Jul 1940, and further heavily damaged, at Toulon, 27 Nov 1942.

Algérie, French cruiser (1934), 10,000 tons, eight 8-in guns, six 21.7-in torp tubes, 31 kts; scuttled at Toulon, 27 Nov 1942.

Marseillaise, French cruiser (1937), 7,600 tons, nine 6-in guns, four 21.7-in torp tubes, 31 kts.

Tigre, French destroyer (1926), 2,126 tons, five 5.1-in guns, six 21.7-in torp tubes, 35.5 kts.

Le Fantasque, French destroyer (1934), 2,569 tons, five 5.5-in guns, nine 21.7-in torp tubes, 37 kts.

Duquesne and *Tourville*, French cruisers (1928), 10,000 tons, eight 8-in guns, six 21.7-in torp tubes, 33 kts.

Duguay-Trouin, French cruiser (1926), 7,249 tons, eight 6.1-in guns, twelve 21.7-in torp tubes, 33 kts.

The Italian Fleet consisted at this time of six battleships, four of which, *Andrea Doria*, *Caio Duilio*, *Conte di Cavour*, and *Giulio Cesare*, had been completed during the 1914-18 war, but had been reconstructed and modernised—as had *Warspite* and *Queen Elizabeth*-class battleships of the British Navy—and two of which, *Vittorio Veneto* and *Littorio*, laid down in 1934, were new vessels; nineteen cruisers, including seven 8-inch gun ships of the *Bolzano*, *Zara*, and *Trento* classes, and twelve 6-in gun vessels of the *Emanuele Filiberto* and *Condottiere* classes, all completed during the pre-war decade; some fifty destroyers and at least 115 submarines;⁶ and small craft. The Italian Navy had no aircraft carriers, but could be strongly supported in the air by the land-based aircraft of the Italian Air Force, reputed to number about 2,000 first line machines, with 400 to 500 in reserve, operating from bases in Italy, North Africa, and the Dodecanese. In June 1940 the main Italian Fleet was based in Italy, the 1st and 2nd Squadrons⁷ at Taranto and Naples respectively; with some cruisers at Palermo and destroyers and submarines at Trapani in Sicily, where also, at Augusta, were the two new battleships, carrying out exercises before taking their place in the fleet. There were light forces at the Dodecanese Islands, and some destroyers and submarines based on Massawa in the Red Sea.⁸

The combined British and French fleets were thus numerically superior to that of Italy in capital ships and about equal to it in cruisers. Allied numerical inferiority lay in destroyers and submarines, in which categories they were outnumbered by more than one-third of their total. In general the Italians had the important advantage of greater speed in all classes of surface vessels, and possessed vastly superior air power which could be used from bases ideally situated for attack and defence. Furthermore, Italy's commanding geographical position, by which the Mediterranean Sea and the fleets of her enemies were divided, would, if exploited with energy and determination, have more than offset her discrepancy in capital ships.

Le Fortuné, *Forbin* and *Basque*, French destroyers (1927-29), 1,378 tons, four 5.1-in guns, six 21.7-in torp tubes, 33 kts.

HMS *Warspite*, battleship (1915), 30,600 tons, eight 15-in and eight 6-in guns, 24 kts.

HMS *Royal Sovereign*, battleship (1916), 29,150 tons, eight 15-in and twelve 6-in guns, 21 kts.
HMS *Terror*, monitor (1916), 7,200 tons, two 15-in guns, 12 kts; sunk by enemy aircraft off Libyan coast 24 Feb 1941.

⁶ On 11 March 1940 Mussolini told Ribbentrop that 120 Italian submarines would be ready the following May. *Ciano Diplomatic Papers* (1949).

⁷ In the composition of the Italian Fleet a squadron consisted of two or more *divisioni*, each of which contained two or three large warships—battleships or cruisers—to which might be added one or more *squadriglia*, each of which consisted of four or more ships of the same type—destroyers, torpedo boats, submarines, etc.

⁸ *Andrea Doria* and *Caio Duilio*, Italian battleships (1915-16; reconstructed 1937-40), 23,622 tons, ten 12.6-in and twelve 5.3-in guns, 27 kts.

Conte di Cavour and *Giulio Cesare*, Italian battleships (1913-15; reconstructed 1933-37), 23,622 tons, ten 12.6-in and twelve 4.7-in guns, 27 kts; *Conte di Cavour* torpedoed by naval aircraft at Taranto, 11 Nov 1940, and badly damaged.

Vittorio Veneto and *Littorio*, Italian battleships (1940), 35,000 tons, nine 15-in and twelve 6-in guns, 30 kts; *Littorio* was in August 1943 renamed *Italia*; she was torpedoed (for the third time in her career) on 9 Sep 1943, but reached Malta.

Bolzano, *Zara* and *Trento*, Italian cruisers (1929-33), 10,000 tons, eight 8-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 32-36 kts; *Zara* sunk off Cape Matapan, 29 Mar 1941; *Bolzano* and *Trento* damaged by British submarines 1942.

E. Filiberto Duca d'Aosta, Italian cruiser (1935), 7,283 tons, eight 6-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 36.5 kts.

Condottiere, Italian cruiser (1931-33), 5,000 tons, eight 6-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 37 kts.

There were, however, other factors the existence of which, suspected outside Italy at the time, was confirmed from Italian sources after the war: the battle efficiency of the Italian Fleet was weakened by the country's Mediterranean environment, and by traits inherent in the Italian character and that of the Fascist régime. It was Fascist policy to build a large navy to impress the world and deter possible enemies. The ships, to a large extent, suffered in design from the "Mediterranean" tradition, being built for speed in comparatively calm waters, lacking adequate protective armour, and having far too much space devoted to luxurious quarters for officers; the bridges of even destroyers and corvettes were covered and built-in for shelter from the elements. There was lack of encouragement of engineering and scientific development which had its effect—the Italian Navy, for example, fought throughout the war without radar. And the feeling existed that Britain, even if her power in the Mediterranean was inferior, had enormous reserves upon which to draw, in the lack of which Italy was fighting a defensive war. The Italians were particularly hampered in operations by shortage of fuel oil, for lack of which the big ships, in the later stages of the war, were at times immobilised.

For various reasons there was little real fighting spirit or enthusiasm among officers and men of the fleet. Although there was a small but powerful core of Fascist minded officers in key places—ambitious men whose political leanings had gained them recognition and promotion (Mussolini held the portfolio of Navy Minister)—Fascism had infiltrated far less into the navy than into any other walk of Italian life, and most senior officers from the rank of lieutenant-commander upwards were staunch Monarchists, little tainted with Fascism, but torn between a hatred of Germany and a fear of Communism.

The Italian naval officer's feelings towards Britain had, in most instances, been friendly until the Abyssinian crisis. He remembered Britain's aid and sympathy in the period of the *Risorgimento*, and the fact that the two countries had never been at war; and he felt that the ties of friendship were strengthened by the "brotherhood of the sea". But Britain's attitude in the Abyssinian period was incomprehensible to the Italian mind, and her subsequent inactivity in the face of Germany's provocative actions culminating in the annexation of Austria, caused Italians to feel that they were being driven into German arms, and bitterness grew against Britain. Yet the Italian Navy did not feel that war with Britain was justified; and when it finally came, many officers believed that their only hope lay in defeat, since they had few illusions about Germany.

Discipline in the navy, though superficially strict, suffered from the characteristics of officers and ratings. The majority of the permanent officers came from the centre and north of Italy, from such towns as Genoa, Leghorn, Venice, Trieste, Florence, Milan, Rome, Turin, and surrounding regions. Among the ratings, the greatest proportion were southerners—recruited from fishermen, boat-builders, sponge divers and other sea trades predominating in southern Italy—and added to this gulf between

local sympathies was that between the living conditions on board ship, where the luxury of accommodation, furnishings, and food and wine of the officers contrasted strongly with the lot of the ratings. The officer's manner with subordinates was brusque, and he had little consideration for their welfare; and punishments of ratings for minor infringements were severely and freely given. The team spirit, never strong among the individualistic Italians, was thus further weakened, and discipline tended to break down in a crisis.

Naval administration was bad, and there was incompetency in organisation which induced cynical apathy among the seagoing forces. Training was sketchy, and never intensive during the war, exercises being cancelled when the weather was bad and seas were heavy. The movements of all ships were controlled directly by the Ministry of Marine in Rome, and commanding officers afloat were seldom allowed to use their own discretion. In actual war operations not only strategy, but tactics, were vested in the Ministry, where was only the haziest appreciation of what was happening at sea, and where the fear of losses was a determining factor. Consequently occasions arose when a commanding officer in superior strength and favourable circumstances was ordered from Rome to retire. Confidence was sapped by lack of faith in reports of Italian naval successes; reports which were fruits of a general tendency to exaggerate, of which the Italians were aware but which they themselves did nothing to correct. Finally, the modern Italian Navy—though Fascist training traced Italy's achievements on the seas back to the Roman Empire's naval victories, commemorated in the existing fleet in the name of the battleship *Caio Duilio*, as the later victory of Lepanto was in that of her sister ship *Andrea Doria*—was not founded until 1861. There was no long unbroken line of tradition to inspire confidence and pride.

The British Mediterranean Fleet was in an entirely different position. Many of those now manning the ships had seen arduous service in various parts of the world during the 1914-18 war and the intervening years; and nine months actual experience and training in the existing conflict lay immediately behind them. The Mediterranean Station, where ships in peacetime remained in full commission for two-and-a-half years with few changes in their crews, had long been recognised as an ideal training ground. A regular routine had been followed: spring cruises in the western basin; the Central Mediterranean in the summer; the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean in the autumn and winter. During the decade leading up to the outbreak of war in 1939 training, especially in night-fighting, had increased in efficiency. Previously night-fighting had been looked upon as something to be avoided, but a change in British naval opinion occurred in 1929, as a result of a combined memorandum from the Commanders-in-Chief of the Atlantic and Mediterranean Fleets urging upon the Admiralty the great advantages of fighting at night in certain circumstances. Writing later of his period as Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, from 1930 to 1932, Lord Chatfield, who had contributed to this memorandum when Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic, recalled that: "A large part of my

time in the Mediterranean was consequently occupied in developing our night-fighting efficiency. . . . Never again was it to be possible for an enemy fleet to escape destruction under cover of darkness. On the contrary, night-fighting was to be our great opportunity in another war. We would surprise the enemy by our efficiency.”⁹ Chatfield’s second-in-command at this time, and his successor as Commander-in-Chief, was Admiral Fisher, with whom those night-fighting exercises were initiated and by whom they were continued. Fisher’s time as Commander-in-Chief, from 1932 to 1937, included the period of the Abyssinian crisis, when the fleet was on a war footing; while during the term of his successor, Admiral Pound,¹ the Spanish Civil War, with its piratical submarine attacks on merchant ships in the Mediterranean, kept the fleet operating under near-war conditions.

The fleet, therefore, although but lately reconstituted after the dispersal of its units to other stations during the few quiet months in the Mediterranean preceding the growing Italian threat, was at a high pitch of efficiency. Most of its officers and men had been trained under three outstanding Commanders-in-Chief in a sea made familiar to them by constant exercises under all conditions of weather by day and night, so that they knew the Ionian, the Aegean, and the Levant, far better than did their new adversaries. And they were now under a Commander-in-Chief who had spent the greatest proportion of his time afloat in the Mediterranean, in the war of 1914-18 and the near-war years from 1934 on.

Much of Admiral Sir Andrew Browne Cunningham’s service in the first world war was in the Mediterranean as commanding officer of the 890-ton destroyer *Scorpion*—a ship he commanded for the record period of seven years, and in which he won distinction at Gallipoli. With his promotion to captain he commanded destroyer flotillas from 1922 to 1924, and he had big ship experience in command as captain of H.M.S. *Rodney* throughout 1930. In 1934 he was appointed Rear-Admiral Commanding Destroyers, Mediterranean Fleet. “I see a lot of RA(D) who lies close to us,” wrote Fisher, then C-in-C, “and he is a great trump.” Two years later, promoted to vice-admiral, he was commanding the battle-cruiser squadron as second-in-command to Admiral Pound. In June 1939, after seven months at the Admiralty, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, when Pound became First Sea Lord.

Cunningham was known throughout the fleet as “A.B.C.”. He was of middle height, with alert eyes, a high broad head, aggressive ears and jaw, but a humorous mouth. He was intolerant of inefficiency and could be uncompromising in speech and approach. As a young destroyer officer he had shown the dash and initiative which were to remain with him and which, allied to later experience in higher command, were to set the pace of his direction of the naval war in the Mediterranean. But his enthusiasm

⁹ Chatfield, *The Navy and Defence* (1942), p. 240.

¹ Admiral of Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, GCB, OM, GCVO. (Comd HMS *Colossus* at Jutland.) Director Plans Div, Admiralty 1922-25; Second Sea Lord and Ch of Naval Personnel 1932-35; C-in-C Mediterranean Fleet 1936-39; First Sea Lord and Ch of Naval Staff 1939-43. B. 29 Aug 1877. Died 21 Oct 1943.

and drive, salted with a puckish humour, were infectious, and inspired devotion in the fleet, while his humanity earned him the respect alike of his own men and of the enemy.²

As his second-in-command, and Vice-Admiral Commanding Light Forces, Cunningham had Admiral Tovey, also a destroyer officer, who for the twelve months preceding his appointment in June 1940, had been Rear-Admiral Commanding Destroyers, Mediterranean Fleet. He had commanded the destroyer *Onslow* at Jutland, when, in a disabled condition, he attacked the German battle cruiser *Derfflinger*. The greatest part of his time afloat had been spent in destroyers, but, like Cunningham, he had experience of both operational and administrative direction ashore, and had big ship experience in command as captain of *Rodney* from 1932 to 1934. A quick thinker, a proved fighter and seaman, he had charm of personality, and a humanity matching that of his Commander-in-Chief.

The confidence existing between the two leaders was shared with the Admiralty—by whom a large measure of freedom of action was left to the Commander-in-Chief—and extended throughout the command, where it was fully reciprocated; so that, in character and spirit, the Mediterranean Fleet had what the Italian Navy lacked—ships built as efficient fighting units for service in all seas and all weathers; officers and men imbued with a team spirit and with mutual esteem founded on experience; hard training which had brought them to a high degree of efficiency; a long and unbroken tradition of a kind to induce confidence; and resolute and aggressive leadership unhampered by outside interference.

IV

Darkness, descending upon Egypt's Mediterranean littoral on the evening of the 10th June 1940, concealed a coastline in most parts fringed by dangerous off-shore reefs and shoals, but having few outstanding topographical features in the eastern half of its 510 miles. From the Palestinian border at Rafa, the advancing shadows obscured a low, sandy coastal fringe, broken after 100 miles by Port Said and the straight ribbon of the Canal fading southwards into the desert. They travelled on across the 130 miles of Nile delta to Alexandria. They hid the coastal plain, with its occasional cliffs backed by lagoons and salt marshes and the

² At Christmas 1940 Cunningham wrote to a friend: "The war progresses slowly out here but everything that has happened has proved how right Sir William [Fisher] was in 1935-1936 during the Abyssinian time. Many a time when confronted with a difficult situation I cast my mind back and ask myself what he would have done, and the answer always comes the same—to take the bold and direct course—and it pays." Admiral W. James, *Admiral Sir William Fisher* (1943), p. 157.

An incident indicative of Cunningham's character occurred in Alexandria when, as a motor-boat from one of the Australian destroyers was leaving "No. 6 Gate", a man in plain clothes asked the coxswain if he could drop him at *Warspite* as he passed. The coxswain, who thought he was the flagship's canteen manager, agreed, but said clutch trouble prevented his going astern and the passenger would have to jump for it passing the *Warspite's* gangway, as he wouldn't stop the engine for him. The passenger said he would jump all right, and duly did so, at the battleship's midship gangway. It was not until the coxswain got back to his own ship, where was a signal from the C-in-C to the C.O. thanking him for the lift, that he realised who he had put on board the flagship.

As was subsequently learned, Cunningham was regarded in the Italian Navy as the outstanding naval figure of the war, and his humanity, manifested on a number of occasions, and particularly after Matapan, produced a deep impression. The general Italian naval sentiment was that at sea the British and Italian navies fought each other cleanly and without rancour.

low scarps of the Libyan plateau, which stretches 130 miles beyond Alexandria to the small harbour of Mersa Matruh. They swept on a further 100 miles to Salum, where a sheltered bay provides anchorage with good holding ground for large ships, and where the escarpment, here some 600 feet high, comes down to the shore, and the coastline rises in precipitous 300-foot cliffs which continue on to the nearby frontier of Cyrenaica at Marsa Ramla. Eight miles beyond the frontier was the first Italian coastal stronghold, Bardia, with a small harbour enclosed in high, steep cliffs, whose skyline forms a distinct "V" seen from seaward. Tobruk, the main Italian port and naval base on this section of the coast, lay 60 miles farther west, a well sheltered and defended harbour with good depths, and accommodation for large ships. The port of Derna, suitable for only small ships within a sheltering breakwater, lay 80 miles beyond Tobruk; and Benghazi, Cyrenaica's principal port, was another 160 miles on, around the coastal bulge on the eastern shores of the extensive Gulf of Sidra. The ports were linked by a road which in many places was in clear view from the sea.

Alexandria, the largest port and—by virtue of the floating dock—the only capital ship base in the Eastern Mediterranean, far exceeded all the others in size and facilities. Situated at the north-east end of a bay protected by a rock and shoal-studded bank, its Western Harbour, an artificial haven made by a breakwater, provided ample accommodation for the fleet in its outer basin, an area some two miles long and averaging a mile in width, with depths of 56 to 58 feet. Anti-submarine defences had been laid by the net vessel *Protector*.³ The Eastern Harbour, a picturesque semi-circular bight one and a quarter miles in diameter on the site of the ancient port, fringed by a promenade on the landward side and separated from the Western Harbour by a low promontory, was no longer used. Four passages—the Marabout Pass, Boghaz Pass, Corvette Pass, and Great Pass—led through the shoals to the Western Harbour. The Great Pass, about a mile and a half in length, was the main channel and the only one used at night. Boghaz Pass was second in importance and could be used by deep draught ships in calm weather, and the Boghaz Patrol—known to the sailors as "Bughouse Patrol"—was a regular duty of the Australian destroyers based on the port. Alexandria's most conspicuous landmark from the sea was the tall column of Ras el Tin lighthouse.

On the evening of the 10th June, most of the ships of the fleet were in the Western Harbour. At 4.30 p.m. Ciano had told the British and French ambassadors in Rome that from the 11th June Italy would consider herself at war; but news of this declaration did not reach the fleet until two and a half hours later. The event had, however, been anticipated, and on this day the ships' companies had been closed up to first degree anti-aircraft readiness at dawn and dusk. With the news of the declaration the fleet went to two hours' notice for steam, and a projected refit of *Ramillies* was abandoned. *Sydney*, and the Australian destroyers except *Vendetta* refitting in Malta, and *Waterhen* at sea with seven other destroy-

³ HMS *Protector*, netlayer (1936), 2,900 tons, two 4-in guns, 20 kts.

ers under Captain (D)2 in *Hyperion* on an anti-submarine patrol to the westward, were in harbour. Dinner was in progress in *Sydney's* wardroom when, about 8 p.m., the mess president tapped for silence and broke the news that an Italian ultimatum declared a state of war against the Allies as from midnight that night. The news "came like the proverbial bomb into our midst";⁴ with, for some at any rate, the expectation of a heavy air raid the following morning.

A few days earlier, on the 23rd May, Admiral Cunningham had told the Admiralty that in the event of war his initial object would be to secure control of communications in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean, and cut off enemy supplies to the Dodecanese. This objective did not envisage cutting Italian communications with Libya, and Cunningham explained this by the paucity of his light forces and lack of aircraft, the fact that military offensives against Libya were not then contemplated, and that it was important to support Turkey and to deal with Italian naval forces based on the Dodecanese. He did not, however, intend to neglect the Central Mediterranean, but would carry out sweeps in that area.

This statement was not acceptable to Mr Churchill—by this time Prime Minister—who on the 28th May told the Chiefs of Staff Committee:

If France is still our ally after an Italian declaration of war, it would appear extremely desirable that the combined Fleets, acting from opposite ends of the Mediterranean, should pursue an active offensive against Italy. It is important that at the outset collision should take place both with the Italian Navy and Air Force, in order that we can see what their quality really is, and whether it has changed at all since the last war. The purely defensive strategy contemplated by Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean ought not to be accepted. Unless it is found that the fighting qualities of the Italians are high, it will be much better that the Fleet at Alexandria should sally forth and run some risks than that it should remain in a posture so markedly defensive. Risks must be run at this juncture in all theatres.⁵

Cunningham's initial objective could hardly be said to constitute "purely defensive strategy". Control of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean could not be secured, nor the enemy's communications with the Dodecanese severed, by the fleet remaining in Alexandria "in a posture so markedly defensive". The Commander-in-Chief's intention to penetrate the Central Mediterranean had been made clear, and with the Italian lines of communication with Africa intersecting the vital British east-west routes, any such penetration would make a major clash inevitable. Churchill's criticism appears to have been hasty and ill-founded.

Within an hour of the outbreak of war, the bulk of Cunningham's force was slipping for sea "to secure control of communications in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean". *Sydney*, with the 7th Cruiser Squadron, sailed at 1 a.m. on the 11th, and dawn found Alexandria Harbour practically empty and the fleet under Cunningham in *Warspite*, with *Malaya*, *Eagle*, the five cruisers of the 7th Cruiser Squadron, and screening destroyers including *Stuart*, *Vampire*, and *Voyager*, sweeping to the westward, while the French cruiser squadron headed north for the

⁴ W. H. Ross, *Stormy Petrel* (1945), p. 106.

⁵ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol II (1949), pp. 111-12.

Aegean. The Australian destroyers did not remain long with the battle fleet on this occasion. They were detached for Alexandria at 8.15 p.m. on the 11th—being relieved on the screen by the more modern ships of the 2nd Flotilla—and entered harbour at 11 o'clock the following morning. For four days the battle fleet, with the cruisers well in the van and the battleships in support, searched the two areas without sighting any enemy ships or aircraft, although the westward sweep took the 7th Cruiser Squadron almost to the Gulf of Taranto. *Sydney* steamed over 2,000 miles in the operation, during which the squadron carried out reconnaissance off Benghazi on the 12th and the Ionian islands on the 13th, rendezvousing with the Commander-in-Chief at noon each day. *Sydney's* sole excitement was a fruitless depth-charge attack on a reported submarine in the afternoon of the 13th, as she was sweeping south-eastward and along the African coast on the return to Alexandria. *Liverpool* and *Gloucester* were the only ships to come into action with the enemy. Detached to attack any sea forces at Tobruk, they shelled a flotilla of minesweepers off the harbour, sinking one and drawing heavy fire from shore batteries. This episode was watched with interest by a British patrol of Hussars who had penetrated a hundred miles inside the enemy lines, and were on the beach near by. The fleet returned to Alexandria late on the 14th, *Sydney* entering the harbour and securing at 7 o'clock.

For many of those who had not been in action before, this sweep was a period of nervous tension culminating in an anti-climax. As one officer in *Sydney* put it:

I had pictured the Mediterranean alive with enemy submarines lurking in wait for us at every turn, and I accordingly expected all kinds of "fireworks", but at the end of those four days, when nothing at all had happened, I felt quite "flat", and rather like the little boy who went to the circus to see the ferocious man-eating lion and found that it was only an overgrown cat anyway.

There were submarines about, however, and during this period and the following days the ships of the 10th Destroyer Flotilla had a busy time with them. The first ship of the flotilla to gain submarine contact was *Diamond*, who on the 10th June unsuccessfully attacked a submarine off Malta. On the 11th *Decoy*, on patrol off Alexandria, reported that she had attacked a submarine. In the early hours of the following morning the Italians drew first blood when a submarine torpedoed and sank *Calypso*⁶ of the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, off Crete. *Caledon*,⁷ and *Dainty* of the 10th Flotilla, were in company with her at the time, and brought the survivors to Alexandria, where they arrived on the 13th. Meantime a number of minefields had been discovered off Alexandria, denoting the presence of minelaying submarines in the vicinity. *Stuart*, *Vampire*, *Voyager* and *Waterhen* proceeded on patrol from Alexandria in the late afternoon of the 12th, and at 7.40 p.m. *Stuart*, searching independently to seaward, sighted a moored mine on the surface, seventeen miles from Ras el Tin lighthouse. While examining it she detected by echoes numerous

⁶ HMS *Calypso*, cruiser (1917), 4,180 tons, five 6-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 29 kts; sunk south of Crete, 12 Jun 1940.

⁷ HMS *Caledon*, cruiser (1917), 4,180 tons, five 6-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 29 kts.

others below the surface. Waller reported his find, and buoyed the position of the floating mine—which was in about 200 fathoms of water—and throughout the night carried out a stealthy search of the area, seeking further mines and the submarine laying them. Within two hours he had found a second minefield six miles from the first, and a further three miles on he found himself “surrounded by mine echoes”, from which he extricated *Stuart* with some difficulty in the darkness. For the rest of the night he patrolled the vicinity, returning to his first buoyed mine at daylight on the 13th. He was trying to sink it by rifle fire when, in the clear water, a moored mine was sighted below the surface, almost alongside *Stuart* amidships. There were some tense moments on board while Waller carefully manoeuvred with his engines and finally drew clear as *Abingdon* and *Bagshot*⁸ of the 2nd Minesweeping Flotilla, appeared to clear a channel for *Caledon* and *Dainty*, arriving from Crete. *Stuart* escorted *Caledon* and *Dainty* through the minefields, and then led the sweepers to the fields, when “they immediately began to bring up and explode mines in the sweeps”.

After a brief return to harbour to discuss the situation with the Rear-Admiral 1st Battle Squadron and Rear-Admiral Alexandria, Waller reorganised his destroyer patrols in view of the known mine position, while himself searching a hitherto unexplored area in *Stuart*. He was thus engaged shortly after dark on the 13th when a gun flash was sighted to seaward. Waller closed the flash at full speed “to be ready to join in”, having first ordered *Vampire*, who had raced up enthused with similar ideas, to resume his patrol. At 7.53 p.m. *Voyager*, the source of the gun flash, reported a submarine 17 miles to seaward, and *Dainty* and *Decoy*, on the outer anti-submarine patrol, were ordered to close her and hunt. *Stuart* reached *Voyager* at 8.35, and Waller found himself in the centre of yet another minefield, which he reported and buoyed while warning the other ships of the flotilla to keep clear of him. In the meantime *Morrow*, in *Voyager*, reported that he had delivered three depth-charges on the submarine which had been seen to surface on its side, that there had been muffled explosions from the enemy, which had been engaged with gun fire, and that it had finally disappeared beneath the surface. Waller sent *Voyager* and *Decoy* to warn ships of the new danger area, while he spent two hours “in getting myself out of the minefield”. Before *Stuart* was clear, *Voyager*—nearly out of depth charges—reported re-establishing contact with the submarine on the bottom; but by the time Waller reached her contact had been lost, and could not be regained. There followed a shouted discussion between the two ships by megaphone across the dark waters, after which, as Waller put it, “we decided the submarine was sunk, and went about our several duties”.

At the time this was assumed to be a submarine scalp to the Australian destroyers, but in the final reckoning the claim of destruction was not allowed, it being considered that the submarine, although damaged,

⁸ HMS's *Abingdon* and *Bagshot*, minesweepers (1918-19), 710 tons, one 4-in gun, 16 kts.

escaped.⁹ Her identity was not conclusively established, but she is thought to have been the Italian *Foca*¹—a minelaying submarine—or one of her class, which was later learned to have been in the approaches to Alexandria at the time. According to a later Italian statement, *Foca* was destroyed on the 23rd October 1940, presumably by a mine of unestablished origin.

The "several duties" of *Stuart* and *Voyager* included further attacks on a submarine before the night was over. At 1.30 a.m. on the 14th June *Voyager* reported expending the remainder of her depth charges on another contact, which was confirmed later by *Stuart*, who also attacked with depth charges, as did *Decoy*. No direct evidence of destruction was available in the darkness, but daylight disclosed a large oil patch extending over a two-mile strip in the vicinity of *Stuart's* attack. Again the destruction of the submarine was not credited in the final analysis.

But the work done by the flotilla in discovering, and determining the position and extent of the minefields, was invaluable. Throughout the 14th, all the available ships of the flotilla searched out an approved channel for the main fleet returning in the afternoon from its four days' sweep; and the Italian expenditure of effort and mines in an endeavour to block the approaches to the base and to cause ship casualties, went for nothing.

V

When Italy entered the war, the British staff in the Middle East estimated that enemy troops in Libya totalled over 215,000. For some weeks after the outbreak the Italians made no attempt to cross the frontier, and on shore, as at sea, the initiative was taken by the British, a small detachment crossing the frontier on the night of the 11th-12th June in the first of a series of harrying operations. The foremost British defended positions were at Mersa Matruh—the railhead—and the frontier force therefore operated at a distance of at least 120 miles from its point of supply and administration. The Italians were better placed with the port of Bardia, believed to be strongly held and the chief supply base for their forces on the frontier, only six miles or so within the Libyan border. To help the army in its harrying operations, it was decided to carry out a naval bombardment of Bardia to destroy military objectives. The Italians were believed to have six or eight 6-inch guns or 8-inch guns on the cliffs north and south of the harbour, and a number of mobile howitzers and some long-range anti-aircraft guns. Considerable enemy air forces, and some cruisers, destroyers and submarines, were at Tobruk, some seventy miles to the west.

Plans were made for a pre-arranged area shoot by the ships participating in the bombardment, the targets to be covered by a heavy neutralising fire. In addition to the bombarding forces, five destroyers carried out an

⁹ White Paper: *German, Italian and Japanese U-Boat Casualties during the War*. Comd 6843 (1946).

¹ *Foca*, Italian submarine (1938), 1,109 tons, one 3.9-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 16 kts; destroyed 23 Oct 1940.

anti-submarine sweep along the coast as far as Tobruk, while two French cruisers and three destroyers cruised off Tobruk in support, and submarines patrolled off Derna and Benghazi.

The bombardment force, consisting of *Orion*—wearing the flag of Vice-Admiral Tovey—*Neptune* and *Sydney* of the 7th Cruiser Squadron, the French battleship *Lorraine*, and the destroyers *Stuart*, *Decoy*, *Dainty*, and *Hasty*,² sailed from Alexandria at 11.30 a.m. on the 20th June, and arrived off Bardia a few minutes before sunrise the following morning. Tovey had decided to make the last twenty miles or so of his approach in the dawn light, and to attack while the sun was still low enough to dazzle the Italian gunners; and the lighthouse on Point Bluff, the south cliff, was the only object clearly discernible through the haze when the force closed the coast on a south-westerly course, the large ships spaced a mile apart on a line of bearing in the order *Orion*, *Lorraine*, *Neptune*, *Sydney*, with two destroyers on the outer bow of each wing ship. *Orion* opened fire on Point Bluff at about 13,500 yards at 5.48 a.m. and was followed by the other ships firing on their allotted targets. Course was altered to the south-eastward shortly after fire was opened, and the bombardment continued for twenty-two minutes, when the force withdrew to the north-eastward.

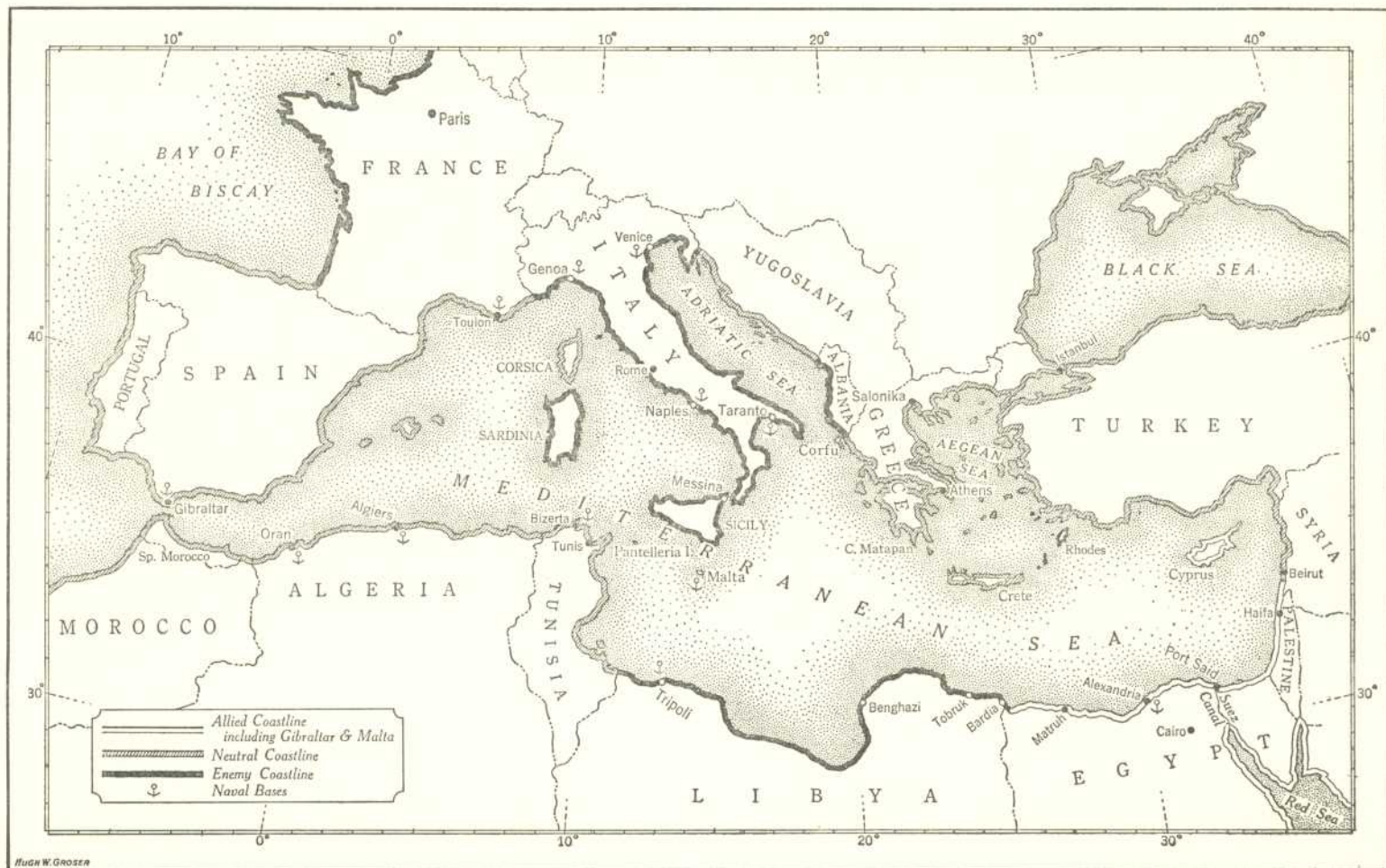
Sydney fired at one target throughout, a camp in the centre of her area. She started a fire there, and apparently caused losses among troops seen to leave the camp during the shoot. *Stuart* and *Decoy* concentrated on barracks and wireless masts in the left half of the town, at a range of about 12,000 yards. Waller commented later that in opening fire at this range he had in view merely the moral effect on his guns' crews and ship's company generally, and "the effective neutralising fire produced, assuming 4.7-inch shells capable of doing material damage ashore, was therefore in the nature of a pleasant surprise". According to members of *Stuart's* ship's company, months later when Bardia had fallen to the British forces, fragments of 4.7-inch shell of the type *Stuart* had fired were found in her target area.

The Italians made no reply to the fire, and the squadron could see no coast defence guns in position. Each of the large ships had a spotting aircraft aloft, and a few ineffectual rounds fired at these from anti-aircraft guns was the only opposition encountered. The sole casualty suffered by the bombarding force was that of *Sydney's* amphibian aircraft, which, as Tovey put it in his remarks on the operation, was "shot up by friendly fighters", of the Royal Air Force. Although the aircraft was badly damaged, the pilot, Flight Lieutenant Price,³ R.A.A.F., managed to fly it to Mersa Matruh, where it broke up on landing, but with no injury to pilot or observer.⁴

² HMS *Hasty*, destroyer (1936), 1,340 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk by German submarine, E Mediterranean, 15 Jun 1942.

³ W Cdr T. McB. Price, DFC, 172. Comd 20 Sqn 1941-42, 14 Sqn 1943. Accountant; of Adelaide; b. Adelaide 14 Nov 1914.

⁴ The British were not alone in making errors in aircraft recognition. Just a week later Air Marshal Balbo, the Governor-General of Libya and Commander of the Italian Army in North Africa, was killed. Ciano recorded in his diary: "Balbo is dead. A tragic mistake has brought his end. The A/A battery at Tobruk fired on his 'plane, mistaking it for an English 'plane, and brought it to the ground."



Strategic Situation in Mediterranean after fall of France, June 1940

In all, the three cruisers and the four destroyers expended 400 rounds of 6-inch and 154 of 4.7-inch shells respectively, and *Lorraine* fired 53 rounds of 13.4-inch and 37 of 5.5-inch. From what could be seen from the ships and judged subsequently from air photographs, the bombardment destroyed some ammunition and other storehouses, blew up an ammunition dump, and damaged or set fire to barracks and buildings in and near the town. Cunningham described it as "a useful minor operation, in which the damage caused fully justified the ammunition expended".

The force returned to Alexandria at 10.40 p.m. on the day of the bombardment. Possibly as a reprisal, the Italians delivered their first air raid on the port early the following morning. Some bombs exploded not far from *Sydney's* berth, but no damage was suffered by any ships.

VI

The first bombardment of Bardia was the last operation against the Italians in which Admiral Godfroy's French squadron took part. On the 22nd June the French Government signed an armistice with Germany, and the naval situation in the Mediterranean underwent a drastic change. Hitherto the Anglo-French Fleets had dominated the sea, and considerable stretches of European and African coastline, with major fleet bases, had been important factors in that domination. Now in one stroke the greatest proportion of the French Navy was eliminated or might be used against Britain. Clause Eight of the armistice terms provided that:

The French Fleet, except that part of it left free for the safeguard of French interests in the Colonial Empire, shall be collected in ports to be specified, demobilised, and disarmed under German or Italian control. The German Government solemnly declare that they have no intention of using for their own purpose during the war the French Fleet stationed in ports under German control, except those units necessary for coast supervision and minesweeping. Except for that part (to be determined) of the Fleet destined for the protection of colonial interests, all ships outside French territorial waters must be recalled to France.

This meant that the ships had to be handed over as fighting units, and as such would be at enemy disposition. The French metropolitan and African coastlines and harbours—with those of Syria—were now denied to the British Fleet. The scales had thus dipped suddenly and heavily in Italy's favour. It was a situation in which the suggestion that the fleet should be withdrawn from the Eastern Mediterranean was again brought forward at the Admiralty. It was argued that Alexandria was an unsatisfactory base which probably would be exposed to increasingly severe attack from German as well as Italian aircraft; and that the increased German surface raider activity resulting from the enemy's use of French Atlantic ports would likely demand the use of battleships (which could only be found from the Mediterranean Fleet) for convoy escort purposes. The suggestion was, however, strongly opposed by the British Prime Minister and by Admiral Cunningham, and nothing more was heard of it. Its acceptance would, in Cunningham's opinion, "have been a major disaster, nothing less".

In the Eastern Mediterranean the major units of Admiral Godfrey's force were in Alexandria, whence permission to sail was refused by Cunningham—at which refusal Godfrey appeared thankful. In the Western Mediterranean the French defection left the sea entirely unprotected. On the 25th June the Commander-in-Chief, North Atlantic, Admiral North,⁵ pointed out to the Admiralty that there were now no forces between Gibraltar and the Italian Fleet base. Three days later the Admiralty repaired this situation by constituting a detached squadron—Force "H"—under the command of Vice-Admiral Somerville,⁶ to be based on Gibraltar. This force consisted of the capital ships *Hood*, *Resolution* and *Valiant*; the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal*; the cruiser *Arethusa*; and the destroyers *Faulknor*, *Foxhound*, *Fearless*, *Escapade*, *Forester*, *Foresight* and *Escort*.⁷ Its tasks were to prevent units of the Italian Fleet from breaking out of the Mediterranean, and to carry out offensive operations against the Italian Fleet and Italian coasts. Somerville hoisted his flag in *Hood* at Gibraltar on the 30th of the month.

VII

Admiral Cunningham was thus deprived of the services of the French force at a time when an important operation in the Eastern Mediterranean imposed a severe strain on his resources. This operation—MA.3—was designed to protect simultaneous movements of a slow convoy from the Aegean, and a fast convoy and a slow from Malta, to Egyptian ports. It resulted in the first surface clash with the Italian Navy, and included Australian ships.

Timing of the movements was planned so that the three convoys would be in the vicinity of 35 degrees north, 22 degrees east—position "K", almost due south of Cape Matapan in Greece, and a little more than halfway from Alexandria to Malta—on the 30th June. Here a strong supporting force comprising *Royal Sovereign* (wearing the flag of Rear-Admiral Pridham-Wippell,⁸ Rear-Admiral 1st Battle Squadron), *Ramillies*, *Eagle*, and seven destroyers would be in position. General cover of the Malta convoys, which were to have a close escort of destroyers, was to

⁵ Admiral Sir Dudley North, GCVO, CB, CSI, CMG; RN. (HMS *New Zealand* 1914-16.) Comd North Atlantic Stn 1939-40; Flag Offr i/c Great Yarmouth 1942-45. Of Netherbury, Dorset, Eng; b. 25 Nov 1881.

⁶ Admiral of Fleet Sir James Somerville, GCB, GBE, DSO; RN. (Served Dardanelles 1915-16.) C-in-C East Indies 1938-39; OC Force "H" 1940-42; C-in-C Eastern Fleet 1942-44; Head of Admiralty Delegation to USA 1944-45. Of Somerset, Eng; b. 1882. Died 19 Mar 1949.

⁷ HMS *Resolution*, battleship (1916), 29,150 tons, eight 15-in and twelve 6-in guns, 21 kts; seriously damaged by French submarine, 25 Sep 1940.

HMS *Valiant*, battleship (1916), 31,100 tons, eight 15-in and eight 6-in guns, 24 kts.

HMS *Arethusa*, cruiser (1935), 5,220 tons, six 6-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 32.25 kts.

HMS *Faulknor*, destroyer (1935), 1,460 tons, five 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36.75 kts.

HMS *Foxhound*, destroyer (1935), 1,350 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

HMS *Fearless*, destroyer (1935), 1,375 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts;

sunk in air attack on convoy, Mediterranean, 23 Jul 1941.

HMS *Escapade*, destroyer (1934), 1,375 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

HMS *Forester*, destroyer (1935), 1,350 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

HMS *Foresight*, destroyer (1935), 1,350 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts;

sunk in Central Mediterranean, 13 Aug 1942.

HMS *Escort*, destroyer (1934), 1,375 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts;

sunk by German submarine in W Mediterranean, 11 Jul 1940.

⁸ Admiral Sir Henry Pridham-Wippell, KCB, CVO; RN. (1914-18: In HMS's *Audacious* and *Warspite*, and in comd destroyers at Gallipoli, Adriatic and Palestine coast.) Second-in-comd Mediterranean Fleet 1940; Flag Officer Cdg Dover 1942-45. B. 12 Aug 1885. Died 2 Apr 1952.

be provided by the 7th Cruiser Squadron. In close escort of the Aegean convoy were to be *Capetown*⁹ (flag of Rear-Admiral Renouf) and *Caledon* of the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, and four destroyers, *Garland*, *Nubian*, *Mohawk*, and *Vampire*.¹⁰ In addition to these main dispositions, destroyers would be submarine hunting as circumstances required, and air reconnaissance of the Ionian Sea would be carried out by Sunderland flying-boats of No. 201 Group, R.A.F., operating from Malta.

At 6 p.m. on the 26th June, *Caledon*, *Garland* and *Vampire* sailed from Alexandria and joined *Capetown*, *Nubian* and *Mohawk* at sea the following day on passage to the Dardanelles. At eleven the following morning, Tovey, in general charge of the operation and flying his flag in *Orion*, left Alexandria with the 7th Cruiser Squadron and shaped course for position "K". The Aegean force picked up its convoy of eleven ships on the 28th, and began the southern voyage to Egypt.

Early that afternoon, when the 7th Cruiser Squadron was in the vicinity of position "K", Tovey received a signal from flying-boat L.5806 reporting three Italian destroyers in a position 30 miles south-west of the island of Zante, which lay some 150 miles just to the west of north of him. The signal did not state the destroyers' course, and Tovey, thinking they might be steering south-east for the Kithera Channel between Greece and Crete, altered course to the north to intercept them. That was at ten minutes past four. Half an hour later the destroyers were again reported, this time by flying-boat L.5803, in a position 35 miles west of *Orion* and steering south. Tovey immediately altered course to south-west, increased speed to 25 knots, and formed the squadron on a line of bearing 180 degrees in open order, with the 2nd Division—*Gloucester* and *Liverpool*—stationed five miles 180 degrees from the 1st. *Orion's* position at 5 o'clock was approximately 60 miles west-south-west of Cape Matapan.

For an hour and a half the squadron sped swiftly over a glittering, slightly choppy sea, with a fresh wind broad on the starboard bow. At 6.30 *Liverpool*, the southernmost ship, reported the enemy destroyers in sight bearing 235 degrees from *Orion*. Three minutes later she opened fire. The 1st Division increased to full speed and altered course to close the enemy, who was at this time on a converging course; but at 6.50 *Gloucester* reported the Italians—still invisible from *Orion*—to have altered course to west-south-west, speed 30 knots. Four minutes later *Orion* sighted the destroyers—*Espero*, *Zeffiro*, and *Ostro*¹, of the *Turbine* class—and opened fire at one minute to seven at a range of 18,000 yards. The action was a chase in rapidly failing light with the enemy against the afterglow of

⁹ HMS *Capetown*, anti-aircraft cruiser (1922), 4,200 tons, eight 4-in anti-aircraft guns, 29 kts.

¹⁰ HMS *Garland*, destroyer (1936), 1,335 tons, three 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; transferred to Polish Navy 1939.

HMS *Nubian*, destroyer (1938), 1,870 tons, six 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36.5 kts.

HMS *Mohawk*, destroyer (1938), 1,870 tons, six 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36.5 kts; torpedoed in action with Italian destroyers, Central Mediterranean, 16 Apr 1941.

¹ *Espero*, Italian destroyer (1928), 1,073 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk in Mediterranean, 28 Jun 1940.

Zeffiro, Italian destroyer (1928), 1,073 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk in Mediterranean, 9 Jul 1940.

Ostro, Italian destroyer (1928), 1,092 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; destroyed by air torpedo in Bomba Bay, Cyrenaica, 22 Aug 1940.

the sunset which, however, reported Tovey, "was not so effective as is frequently the case". With the wind fine on the bow, the Italians made clever use of smoke, making ranging and spotting difficult for their pursuers.

With the sighting from *Orion*, all ships came into action. The spacing of the two divisions of the 7th Cruiser Squadron placed the enemy under fire from each quarter, while he directed his fire on *Liverpool* and *Gloucester* to port and *Orion* to starboard. At five minutes past seven *Neptune* reported that the enemy had fired torpedoes, and course was altered for three minutes to comb the "spread". By 7.20 the range was down to 14,000 yards, and the 1st Division altered course 50 degrees to starboard to open "A" arcs.² Shortly after this *Espero* was seen to be hit, and at 8 o'clock she was disabled and stopped. For about ten minutes the chase of the other two destroyers continued, but then Tovey broke off the engagement, as light was failing and ammunition was running short.

The squadron then shaped course for Malta, and Tovey detached *Sydney*, to sink *Espero*, with discretion to stop and pick up survivors. *Sydney* accordingly headed for the destroyer, but when about 6,000 yards distant, two shots from the enemy were observed to fall, 200 yards short but in line with the cruiser. Collins had no option but to open fire, and hits on the enemy were observed from four salvos, to which no reply was made, and *Espero* was seen to be on fire amidships and forward. At 8.35 *Sydney* was stopped 2,000 yards astern of *Espero*, whose end was near. In the glare of flames men could be seen jumping overboard from her; there was an explosion in the vicinity of the bridge; and at twenty to nine she listed almost on to her beam ends, and sank in about 1,400 fathoms, in position 35 degrees 18 minutes north, 20 degrees 12 minutes east. From the depths that swallowed her thudded a series of explosions, probably caused by the detonation of her depth charges.

For nearly an hour and three quarters *Sydney* remained in the vicinity, with both cutters lowered, and Jacob's ladders, boatswain's chairs, and heaving lines over the side to aid survivors. From the dark waters around her, cries for help could be heard in all directions as the rescue work went on. Her position was one of considerable risk. Submarines were about, and the flames from *Espero* must have been visible for many miles. At nineteen minutes past ten, after having been warned by signal that dispatch was necessary, and having picked up all survivors in sight, she proceeded to rejoin the squadron. Before doing so, however, she slipped a cutter with oars, sails, provisions, water and rifles, and burned a 10-inch signalling projector on it as she steamed away, to enable any survivors still in the water to make for it.

The rescue work was hampered by the darkness and the fact that *Sydney* herself had to remain blacked out. But forty-seven Italians were taken from the water, of whom three died on the passage to Alexandria where the remainder—three officers and forty-one ratings—were landed. From the prisoners it was learned that *Espero* and her consorts were on

² "To open 'A' arcs": to bring all main armament to bear.

passage from Taranto to Libya with troops and stores when they were intercepted; that *Espero* had about 225 of ship's complement and passengers on board; and that her captain had been killed by the explosion in the vicinity of the bridge. The survivors were well treated by *Sydney's* people. As one of her officers later recalled:

By the next morning it was a common sight to see our lads shepherding groups of survivors around the ship, looking after all their wants, giving them all the cigarettes they could smoke and treating them to ice-cream and "goffers" (soft drinks) from the canteen.

No damage save that resulting from the concussion of their own salvoes was suffered by the ships of the squadron. In *Sydney*, when the action was joined,

most messes had their tables set ready for the evening meal. The first salvo started the wrecking process and from then on until the end of the chase things went from bad to worse. With each salvo the ship shuddered violently and the air became filled with dust and fluff. Light bulbs began to burst with popping noises, showering us with tiny splinters, and from all around came the crashing of objects of all shapes and sizes and the tinkling of falling glass. Every movable object—including a few we thought immovable—was shaken from its resting place during the action. What a din and what a mess.³

Morning showed the muzzles of the guns stripped of paint, which hung in long reddish-grey streamers almost to the deck.

This action brought home a lesson, and emphasised a weakness in the Mediterranean Fleet. To achieve the destruction of *Espero* the 7th Cruiser Squadron had indulged in what Admiral Cunningham described as the excessive expenditure of nearly 5,000 rounds of 6-inch ammunition. In eagerness to secure a decisive result in a race against night in this first surface action, no regard had been paid to the peacetime experience of the low rate of hitting to be expected in the conditions of a chase in failing light of small vessels dodging and making smoke, at ranges of between 18,000 and 14,000 yards. "We have learnt our lesson," said Cunningham in a subsequent signal to the Admiralty, to whom he had a few days earlier remarked: "Assume it has not been overlooked that cruisers have not even an outfit of ammunition on board and reserves still some way off." As it was, the expenditure of ammunition in this instance necessitated the return of the 2nd Division of the squadron to Port Said to replenish. Operation MA.3 had to be abandoned incomplete, and the sailing of the Malta convoys was postponed. The Aegean convoy, however, reached Alexandria and Port Said on the 2nd and 3rd July respectively without loss, though it had been subjected to high level bombing attacks by aircraft from the Dodecanese Islands on the 29th and 30th June, and the 1st July. It was on this last day that *Sydney* and the ships of the 1st Division reached Alexandria, having also undergone air attack without damage on the return journey.

As part of operation MA.3, ships of the 10th Destroyer Flotilla were meanwhile engaged in activities resulting in the sinking of two Italian

³ Ross, *Stormy Petrel*, p. 124.

submarines. At dawn on the 27th June *Voyager* sailed from Alexandria with her flotilla companions *Dainty*, *Decoy*, and *Defender*, and *Ilex*⁴ of the 2nd Flotilla. At sunset Alexandria lay 200 miles astern of them, and at 6.28, when about 100 miles south-east of Crete, a surfaced submarine—which shortly submerged—was sighted on the horizon. The destroyers quickly closed the position, and within a few minutes five depth-charge attacks were made by *Dainty*, *Decoy*, *Defender* and *Ilex*. An oil trail was observed, and was followed by *Dainty* in the falling darkness, and after a hunt of ninety minutes the submarine was again reported on the surface at 2,500 yards. During the intervening period—as was subsequently learned—the submarine, the *Console Generale Liuzzi*, had been badly shaken by the initial attacks. The first had put all lights out except in the control room, had shattered depth gauges, and blown the naphthalene tank from the bulkhead. The second had done further damage, including the entry of water into the after compartment, which had gassed the batteries. This combination of mishaps made *Liuzzi* immobile when she surfaced, as there was insufficient battery power to start the engines, and no alternative naphthalene. As soon as she was again sighted, she came under gun fire from *Dainty* and *Defender*, and very soon a white light was waved as a token of surrender. Cease fire was ordered, and *Dainty* closed the submarine, whose officers and crew were in the conning tower; and the work of removing them, and of picking up those who jumped overboard, began. The destroyers lowered boats—*Voyager's* whaler picked up thirteen survivors—and *Dainty* put her bows almost up to the submarine before the last two Italians could be persuaded to jump into the water. In all, it took three and a quarter hours to induce the more reluctant to leave the submarine after the surrender; and she was then sunk by *Dainty* with depth charges.

By dawn on the 29th the five destroyers were nearly 400 miles farther west, with Crete 160 miles due east of them, when another surfaced submarine was sighted. She was the *Uebi Scebeli*, which dived and was attacked with depth charges by *Ilex*, *Voyager*, and *Defender*; and, forced to the surface, was sunk by gun fire from *Dainty* at 8.20 after survivors had been rescued. Five minutes later the destroyers proceeded for Alexandria, and entered the harbour in the evening of the 30th, *Voyager* securing at 7.34 and landing her survivors.

Information provided by the prisoners from *Liuzzi* and *Uebi Scebeli* indicated the presence of an Italian submarine patrol line between Crete and the African coast, and on the 29th June *Stuart* and *Hostile*⁵ sailed from Alexandria to hunt north of Derna. A submerged submarine was located during the morning of the 1st July, and the two destroyers carried out a series of depth charge attacks which—from the evidence of the discharge of large quantities of air, and the fading of the echo, believed as a result of the great depth to which the submarine sank—were at the

⁴ HMS *Ilex*, destroyer (1937), 1,370 tons, four 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

⁵ HMS *Hostile*, destroyer (1936), 1,340 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; mined and sunk off Cape Bon, in Mediterranean, 23 Aug 1940.

time assumed to have destroyed her. But the claim was not allowed in the final analysis. The two ships returned to Alexandria in the afternoon of the 2nd July.

In spite of poor asdic results in the warm waters of the Mediterranean and Red Sea, the results of the anti-submarine warfare were promising. On the 28th June, Ciano recorded in his *Diary* that Admiral Cavagnari, the Italian Chief of Naval Staff,

complains of the High Command. There is disorder, and no one assumes responsibility. The submarines we have lost number eight.

On the following day he could have added two more to the score. By the end of June the Italian Navy had lost ten, of which six were in the Mediterranean, two in the Red Sea, one in the Gulf of Aden, and one in the Persian Gulf.⁶ During the same period three British submarines, *Grampus*, *Orpheus* and *Odin*,⁷ were lost in the Mediterranean, presumably victims to deep laid mines.

VIII

During the first week in July the British Government took bold and ruthless action to determine the question of the disposal of the French Fleet. Before the signing of the armistice, important units of the fleet had left France for Allied and French empire ports. A number, including the battleships *Courbet* and *Paris*, the large destroyers (*contre torpilleurs*) *Léopard* and *Le Triomphant*, some destroyers and submarines—among them *Surcouf*—proceeded to England. In addition to the major vessels already in North African ports, the battleships *Richelieu* and *Jean Bart*—the last named non-operational, being without main armament—sailed to Dakar and Casablanca respectively.⁸ The British Government determined that none of

⁶ *Macalle*, Italian submarine (1936), 615 tons, one 3.9-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 14 kts; wrecked on reef SE of Port Sudan, 14 Jun 1940.

Provana, Italian submarine (1938), 941 tons, two 3.9-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17 kts; sunk by French *Curieuse* in W Mediterranean, 17 Jun 1940.

Galileo Galilei, Italian submarine (1934), 880 tons, one 3.9-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17 kts; captured by HM trawler *Moonstone* off Aden, 19 Jun 1940.

Diamante, Italian submarine (1933), 590 tons, one 3.9-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 14 kts; torpedoed and sunk by HM submarine *Parthian* NNW of Tobruk, 20 Jun 1940.

Evangelista Torricelli, Italian submarine (1934), 880 tons, two 3.9-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17 kts; sunk by HMS's *Kandahar* and *Kingston* off Perim, 22 Jun 1940.

Galvani, Italian submarine (1938), 896 tons, one 4.7-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17 kts; rammed and sunk by HMS *Falmouth*, Persian Gulf, 23 Jun 1940.

Console Generale Liuzzi, Italian submarine (1939), 1,031 tons; sunk SE of Crete, 27 Jun 1940.

Argonauta, Italian submarine (1931), 590 tons, one 4-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 14 kts; destroyed by Sunderland aircraft, Central Mediterranean, 28 Jun 1940.

Uebi Scebell, Italian submarine (1938), 613 tons, one 3.9-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 14 kts; sunk W of Crete, 29 Jun 1940.

Rubino, Italian submarine (1933), 590 tons, one 3.9-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 14 kts; destroyed by Sunderland aircraft SW Corfu, 29 Jun 1940.

⁷ HMS *Grampus* (1937), submarine, 1,520 tons, one 4-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 17.5 kts; lost off Augusta, Sicily, 14 Jun 1940.

HMS *Orpheus*, submarine (1930), 1,475 tons, one 4-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17.5 kts; lost between Malta and Alexandria, 27 Jun 1940.

HMS *Odin*, submarine (1929), 1,475 tons, one 4-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17.5 kts; lost in Gulf of Taranto, 14 Jun 1940.

⁸ *Courbet* and *Paris*, French battleships (1913-14), 22,189 tons, twelve 12-in and twenty-two 5.5-in guns, four 18-in torp tubes, 20 kts.

Léopard, French destroyer (1927), 2,126 tons, five 5.1-in guns, six 21.7-in torp tubes, 35.5 kts; wrecked near Benghazi, 27 May 1943.

Le Triomphant, French destroyer (1934), 2,569 tons, five 5.5-in guns, nine 21.7-in torp tubes, 37 kts.

Richelieu and *Jean Bart*, French battleships (1940-43), 35,000 tons, eight 15-in and twenty 5-in guns, over 30 kts.

these ships should be permitted to return to France to fall into German hands, and preventive action was taken on the 3rd July.

The French vessels in the United Kingdom were boarded by superior forces and occupied without resistance except in the case of *Surcouf*, where one British officer and one French officer were killed and others wounded. In the Mediterranean, Force "H" arrived off Oran at dawn on the 3rd, and throughout the day Admiral Somerville endeavoured to secure an agreement that the French ships there and at Mers el Kebir would meet one of four requirements: continue the fight with Britain against the enemy; sail with reduced crews under British control to a British port; sail to a French West Indian port to be demilitarised or perhaps entrusted to the United States until the end of the war; or scuttle in their present position within six hours. But the French Admiral, Gensoul, refused to meet any of these requirements, and late in the afternoon Somerville—under definite and urgent orders from the Admiralty—was forced to open fire, while bombers and torpedo bombers of the Fleet Air Arm also carried out attacks. The fleet bombardment lasted ten minutes. Together with the air attacks it resulted in the sinking of the battleship *Bretagne*, the damaging and beaching of *Dunkerque* and *Provence*, and damage to other vessels. *Strasbourg*, and five destroyers, escaped and reached Toulon.

In Alexandria the affair was fortunately settled without military action or bloodshed, though not without tension. Admiral Godfroy had been informed that his ships would not be permitted to sail, and had been invited to come to terms similar to those proposed to Gensoul at Oran. As at Oran, a decision was sought by the evening of the 3rd. Throughout that day the ships of the Mediterranean Fleet were at immediate notice for steam and ready for action. The destroyers and smaller craft had been berthed alongside, to clear the line of fire if such were necessary. Boarding parties were told off and equipped, turrets manned, and guns loaded. At the last moment Admiral Godfroy called for a parley and negotiations began, but on the morning of the 4th July the situation was still critical, and not until that afternoon was the matter finalised with Godfroy's agreement to immobilise and demilitarise his ships. Yet the temper of some, at least, among the French in Alexandria, was shown by an incident on that morning. At 7.30, when the tension was at its height and British crews were standing by at first degree of readiness, there was an Italian air raid on the port; and a number of the French ships immediately opened fire on the raiders. *Sydney's* war diary for the day sketches the situation in brief entries:

0720, first degree readiness. Situation with French very critical. 0745, engaged enemy aircraft. 0910, second degree readiness. 0945, air raid warning. 1000, first degree readiness. 1300, third degree readiness. 1800, reverted to harbour routine.

Protector, the only ship damaged, and that slightly by bomb splinters and debris, acted up to her name in the Italian air raid. She was berthed alongside at No. 39 Quay, with *Stuart* berthed outside her. At 8 o'clock a stick of six bombs fell around both ships. One bomb exploded on the

roof of the quay shed, and one on the quay a few feet from *Protector*, with the remainder in the water close to *Stuart*. Her position outside *Protector* probably saved *Stuart* from damage. As it was, all she suffered was a harmless bombardment of iron fragments from the coping of the shed, with which she was fairly heavily covered.

Away to the westward in the Atlantic Ocean, another Australian ship—*Australia*—was at this time concerned in the operations to deny the French ships to the enemy. When war broke out with Italy she was in Simonstown, after forming part of the escort of convoy US.3 to South Africa. During the remainder of June she covered the passage of the liner *Ulysses* (14,652 tons) from Capetown to Durban, and escorted *Stratheden* (23,722 tons) back to Capetown whence she sailed on the 25th as escort to a fast convoy—*Stratheden*, *Orion* (23,371 tons), and *Reina del Pacifico* (17,702 tons)—to Freetown, Sierra Leone. The convoy reached Freetown at 8 a.m. on the 3rd July, and here *Australia* met an old shipmate, the seaplane carrier *Albatross*, now H.M. Ship, attached to the South Atlantic command.

On the 23rd June *Richelieu*, which had for some days been shadowed by H.M.S. *Dorsetshire*, had arrived at Dakar, where the British cruiser was keeping watch on her. Anglo-French relations at Dakar, hitherto friendly, had suddenly deteriorated, and at 11.5 p.m. on the 3rd July, *Australia* was ordered by the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic—Vice-Admiral D'Oyly Lyon,⁹ flying his flag in H.M.S. *Edinburgh Castle*¹ at Freetown—to sail immediately and rendezvous with *Dorsetshire* and *Hermes* off Dakar at 5 a.m. on the 5th July. *Australia* weighed and sailed from Freetown within an hour and a half of receiving her orders.

On the passage north in company with *Hermes*, a signal was received from D'Oyly Lyon that French submarines had been ordered to attack British forces off Dakar, and that French submarines and aircraft there were to be attacked and destroyed on sight. *Dorsetshire* reported that she had sighted two submarines, and had sunk or damaged one.

Australia and *Hermes* reached the rendezvous with *Dorsetshire* at ten past five in the morning of the 5th, and for the next two days patrolled off Dakar, *Hermes* maintaining an air patrol over the harbour. On the 7th a signal from the Admiralty directed the Commanding Officer of *Hermes*—Captain Onslow²—to take charge of the operation as an acting rear-admiral, and to communicate to the French naval authorities at Dakar a message of similar import to those presented to Gensoul and Godfroy. A decision was to be requested within four hours of its receipt by the French. The sloop H.M.S. *Milford*,³ which had joined the squadron from Freetown shortly before noon on the 7th, was dispatched to Dakar with the message while the three remaining ships continued to patrol. The French, however,

⁹ Admiral Sir George D'Oyly Lyon, KCB. (1914-18: HMS *Monarch* and Grand Fleet.) C-in-C Africa Stn 1938-40, The Nore 1941-43. B. 3 Oct 1883. Died 20 Aug 1947.

¹ HMS *Edinburgh Castle*, armed merchant cruiser (1910), 13,329 tons, Union Castle Mail SS Co. Ltd, 16.5 kts.

² Capt R. F. J. Onslow, MVO, DSC; RN. (Comd coastal motor boats 1916-18.) Comd HMS *Coventry* 1938-40, HMS *Hermes* 1940-42. B. 29 Mar 1896. Lost in sinking of *Hermes* 9 Apr 1942.

³ HMS *Milford*, sloop (1933), 1,060 tons, six 4-in guns, 16.5 kts.

refused to permit *Milford* to enter harbour, and she rejoined the squadron shortly before sunset. At 6 o'clock the message, in French, was transmitted in plain language through the Dakar wireless station, the time limit for a decision being reduced to two hours.

No reply was received, and it was decided to endeavour to cripple *Richelieu* to prevent her leaving port. After sunset *Milford* towed one of *Hermes'* fast motor-boats towards Dakar. The boat was armed with depth charges, and its crew had their faces blackened. Although an accident put one of its engines out of action, the boat subsequently negotiated the boom defences of the harbour, and at 2.45 a.m. on the 8th July dropped depth charges under *Richelieu's* stern. It then successfully evaded pursuit, and escaped from the harbour to the southward. A further attack on the French battleship was carried out at dawn on the 8th by six torpedo bombers from *Hermes*. Air reconnaissance later disclosed *Richelieu* listing to port and down by the stern, while oil covered the water around her. It was subsequently learned that she had sustained no damage from the depth charge attack but had been struck by one of the torpedoes on the starboard side. This caused severe damage in the compartment abaft the armoured bulkhead. The starboard inner propeller shaft was seriously distorted to a maximum of one metre from its centre line. It would have been impossible for the ship to have steamed at even three-quarters speed until this propeller had been removed.

At 6 a.m. on the 8th the British squadron concentrated 30 miles north-west of Dakar and swept towards the port. But the only opposition encountered was from a single aircraft which passed over the squadron and dropped a stick of bombs which fell harmlessly into the sea about 4 miles from *Australia*. During the day the *Hermes'* motor-boat was recovered, and the ships resumed their patrols. On the 12th July the Admiralty told naval commands that the British Government had decided to take no further action against French warships in French colonial or North African ports.

By this time *Australia* was on her way to the United Kingdom. At 6.20 a.m. on the 9th she parted company with the Dakar force, and on the 11th overtook and joined the escort of her previous convoy—now augmented by additional merchant ships. On the 16th July she anchored in the Clyde, and four days later reached Scapa Flow, where she joined the 1st Cruiser Squadron. During the 27th and 28th of the month, in company with ships of the Home Fleet, she participated in a brief sortie into the North Sea to a position 240 miles west-north-west of Skagerrak, the object being to intercept *Gneisenau*, which was reported to have sailed from Trondheim. Contact was not made, however, and at the end of the month *Australia* was at Scapa Flow with the fleet.

The elimination of the French Navy as an important factor almost at a single stroke by violent action (Churchill wrote later) produced a profound impression in every country. . . . It was made plain that the British War Cabinet feared nothing and would stop at nothing. That was true.⁴

⁴ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol II, p. 211.

In Britain's existing situation, when many in the world counted her already defeated, such a realisation was an inspiration to her well-wishers. But more important was that the stroke reduced the threat to that power at sea which was essential to her existence.⁵ Admiral Darlan, the Commander-in-Chief of the French Navy and Minister of Marine in the Pétain Government, had given repeated assurances that the French Fleet should never fall into German hands; and, in the event, no French ship was ever manned by the Germans or used against Britain by them during the war. When the Germans fully occupied France in 1942, the French ships at Toulon were voluntarily destroyed "contrary"—as Darlan said at the time in a letter to Churchill—"to the wishes of the Laval Government". But in the straits in which she found herself, Britain could not fail to take every precaution against the implications in clause 8 of the armistice terms, a fact which her victims in the French Navy would appear to have recognised. The action at Oran produced a natural bitterness in a section of the French Navy, and strengthened within that navy generally the determination to defend French overseas possessions against the British as against any other aggressor. But the attitude of many in the French Navy was the same as that of Admiral Godfroy at Alexandria in the long months in his flagship following his agreement with Cunningham. Of him the British admiral wrote:

The fate of France and the tragedy of Mers el Kebir were always in his mind; but no success of the British Fleet passed without his letter of cordial congratulation, no loss without his letter of sympathy.⁶

IX

The postponement of the sailing of the Malta convoys with the abandonment of operation MA.3, led to operation MA.5 a few days later. It employed practically the whole strength of the fleet, and was a sweep into the Central Mediterranean to cover the convoy movements; while governing these movements was Cunningham's determination to seize any opportunity of bringing the enemy to action. The intention was for the fleet to reach a position of cover east of Cape Passero—the south-eastern point of Sicily—on the afternoon of 9th July, when destroyers would be detached to Malta to escort the convoys, which would sail that night. The opportunity would also be taken to carry out operations against the Sicilian coast. The Malta convoys, MF.1 of three ships and thirteen knots, and MS.1 of four ships and nine knots, were carrying evacuees and fleet stores from Malta to Alexandria.

The fleet, less *Ramillies* and the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, sailed from Alexandria on the night of 7th July in three groups: Force "A"—7th

⁵ Earlier in her history Britain had not hesitated to take similar action when that power was similarly threatened. Writing of Admiralty investigations in 1907 into the possibilities of a "bolt from the blue" attack on the British Fleet, Admiral Fremantle said: "In all our investigations we could find two cases only of such hostilities being undertaken unless preceded either by a time of strained relations or a formal declaration of war. These were our two attacks on Denmark in 1801 and 1807 respectively . . . both of which, though much criticised at home, were in my opinion fully warranted by the strategical situations obtaining, and the successful execution of which secured the desired results." S. R. Fremantle, *My Naval Career, 1880-1928* (1949), p. 126.

⁶ Cunningham, p. 255.

Cruiser Squadron and *Stuart*, (D)10, under the command of Admiral Tovey; Force "B"—the Commander-in-Chief in *Warspite*, with the destroyers *Nubian*, (D)14, *Mohawk*, *Hero*, *Hereward*, and *Decoy*; Force "C"—Pridham-Wippell in *Royal Sovereign*, with *Malaya* and *Eagle*, and destroyers *Hyperion*, (D)2, *Hostile*, *Hasty*, *Ilex*, *Imperial*, *Dainty*, *Defender*, *Juno*, *Janus*, *Vampire* and *Voyager*.⁷ The three forces had cleared the harbour by midnight on the 7th-8th July, and proceeded independently through separate set positions towards a rendezvous 120 miles east of Cape Passero, and 150 from Malta. The Commander-in-Chief's mean line of advance was N.W. by W., 20 knots.

Arrangements had been made for flying-boat patrols by No. 201 Group, R.A.F., from Malta; and also for a diversionary operation by Force "H" from Gibraltar. This was to be an air attack on Cagliari in Sardinia, by aircraft from *Ark Royal*, and Force "H" left Gibraltar on the 8th July.

Hasty made depth-charge attacks on two submarines shortly after leaving Alexandria, and *Imperial* had to return to harbour with a burst steam pipe. Otherwise the fleet steamed through the night without incident; but at 8.7 a.m. on the 8th a report was received from the submarine *Phoenix*⁸ that three hours earlier she had attacked—apparently unsuccessfully—an Italian force of two battleships and four destroyers about 180 miles east of Malta and some 500 to the westward of the fleet. The enemy ships were steering south. Suspecting that they might be covering an important convoy, Cunningham requested the Vice-Admiral, Malta, to arrange for a flying-boat to find and shadow them. Meanwhile the fleet maintained its course and speed.

Throughout the 8th the three groups of the fleet were subjected to heavy high-level bombing attacks by aircraft apparently from bases in the Dodecanese. Most ships experienced near misses, but Force "A" was the only one to suffer damage and casualties. Early in the morning *Stuart* had been directed to take station ahead of the 7th Cruiser Squadron, whose ships were then disposed in line abreast. The first indication of air attack was shortly after 10 o'clock, when three bombs exploded astern of *Stuart*. The attacking aircraft were so high as to be tiny shining specks against the blue sky. Further ineffectual attacks occurred during the day, the majority being directed against Forces "B" and "C", which were to the north-eastward of the cruiser squadron. The height of the attacking aircraft, and their appearance as glittering specks, led the 7th Cruiser Squadron to open fire during the afternoon on the planet Venus. It was an indignity the Goddess of Love, in her day-time manifestation in the sky, was often

⁷ HMS *Hero*, destroyer (1936), 1,340 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

HMS *Hereward*, destroyer (1936), 1,340 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; lost in action with enemy aircraft off Crete, 29 May 1941.

HMS *Imperial*, destroyer (1937), 1,370 tons, four 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; lost in action with enemy aircraft off Crete, 29 May 1941.

HMS *Juno*, destroyer (1939), 1,690 tons, six 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; lost in action with enemy aircraft off Crete, 21 May 1941.

HMS *Janus*, destroyer (1939), 1,690 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk by aircraft off Anzio, W Italy, 23 Jan 1944.

⁸ HMS *Phoenix*, submarine (1931), 1,475 tons, one 4-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17.5 kts; lost off Sicily, 17 Jul 1940.

to undergo during the Mediterranean campaign. The last attack of the day—it interrupted a game of Mah Jongg on the watch keepers' mess deck of *Stuart*—was aimed at the cruiser squadron. One aircraft tracked *Gloucester* from astern, and its stick of bombs crept along the cruiser's wake in successive lofty plumes of water until the final bomb overtook its target and scored a direct hit on the compass platform. The captain, six officers, and eleven ratings were killed, and three officers and six ratings wounded. The damage to the bridge and director control tower necessitated gun control and steering from aft; and although *Gloucester* continued with the operation, she took no part in the subsequent action.

Meanwhile, at 3.10 p.m., flying-boat L.5803—which a few days earlier had reported *Espero* and her consorts to the 7th Cruiser Squadron—reported two battleships, six cruisers and seven destroyers about 90 miles north of Benghazi. When sighted, this force was steering N.N.W., but shortly after altered course to E.N.E. This sighting, coupled with the impression, given by the intensive bombing attacks, that the Italians had a special reason for wishing to keep the fleet away from the Central Mediterranean, strengthened Cunningham's view that the Italian movements were covering an important convoy, and he decided temporarily to abandon his own convoy covering operation, and to move the fleet at best speed towards Taranto, to get between the enemy and his base.

The night of the 8th-9th passed without incident, and shortly before dawn *Eagle* flew off three aircraft to search to a depth of 60 miles to the south-west. At 6 a.m. on the 9th, the fleet was concentrated 50 miles due west of the south-west extremity of Greece and was disposed with the 7th Cruiser Squadron and *Stuart* in the van eight miles ahead of *Warspite* and her screen, and the 1st Battle Squadron, *Eagle*, and their screening destroyers, eight miles in the rear of *Warspite*. The mean line of advance was altered to the southward—to W. by S.—speed 15 knots.

It was of this period that an observer in *Vampire* later recorded his impressions. He was an Englishman, a passenger taking passage from Alexandria to Malta, and Commander Walsh had given him his cabin to sleep in. He recalled:

In the Royal Australian Navy things are slightly different to what they are in the Royal Navy. The Captain's servant was a very pally sort of cove, and he woke me the following morning with a cup of tea and the remark: "I shouldn't lie around all day if I was you. Get up on deck. You'll like it. There's going to be a battle."

"A battle!" I echoed stupidly. "What sort of battle?"

"Just an ordinary bloody battle," he replied. "The sea's lousy with ships. Looks like all the Med. Fleet's here."

I went on deck as I was, in a pair of pyjama-trousers, with a cup of tea in my hand. Remember it was mid-July in the Mediterranean. The morning was fresh and glorious, with a brilliant young sun still painting the new sky with the effulgence of his coming. The sea was sapphire, set with diamonds. The wake of *Vampire's* passing was like coiled ropes of pearls. It was a morning for poesy. It was also a morning for something grimmer. The young Australian rating was right. The sea was lousy with ships.⁹

⁹ F. Gerard, *Malta Magnificent* (1943), p. 35.



Captain J. A. Collins
on Bridge of
H.M.A.S. *Sydney*.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Members of *Sydney's*
Crew looking through
Shell-hole in Funnel.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

* Lieut-Commander R. Rhoades with Captain H. M. L. Waller on Bridge of H.M.A.S. *Vendetta*.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Captain H. L. Howden on Bridge of H.M.A.S. *Hobart*.

From now on, enemy reports from the flying-boats and from *Eagle's* reconnaissance aircraft, came in at frequent intervals, and enabled Cunningham to visualise the size and movements of the Italian forces with some clarity. At 8 a.m. the main enemy group of two battleships, four cruisers and ten destroyers bore 280 degrees from him distant about 145 miles, steering north at 15 knots. Another force of six cruisers and eight destroyers was stationed 80 degrees 20 miles from the main group. Cunningham altered his mean line of advance from W. by S. to N.W. by W., and increased speed to 18 knots, to work to the northward of the enemy. At 11.45 a.m. the enemy was believed to bear 295 degrees from *Warspite*, distant 90 miles, and a striking force of nine Swordfish aircraft was flown off from *Eagle* to attack. But about this time the enemy battle fleet altered course to the southward, and the striking force failed to find it. An attack was made, however, on a large number of ships sighted steering south, but no hits were observed. By 1.30 p.m. it was clear to Cunningham that the enemy had turned southward to concentrate his forces, and this was confirmed by a flying-boat report a few minutes later of three battleships and a large number of cruisers and destroyers in 37 degrees 58 minutes North 17 degrees 55 minutes East, steering S.W. and altering course to N.N.E., speed 18 knots. The enemy, after concentrating, had turned north again, and the two fleets were rapidly closing. Cunningham stood on to the north-westward until 2 o'clock when, satisfied that he had cut the Italians off from Taranto, he altered course to west to increase the rate of closing. His speed of advance was limited by that of *Royal Sovereign*—about two knots less than *Warspite's* 24½. *Warspite* was acting as a battle cruiser to support the 7th Cruiser Squadron who, as the Commander-in-Chief later wrote in his dispatch, "being so few and lacking in 8-inch ships, were very weak compared with the enemy's cruiser force".

Within half an hour of Cunningham's alteration towards the Italians, the centres of the opposing fleets were about 30 miles apart. The Mediterranean Fleet was disposed as at the morning concentration, with the 7th Cruiser Squadron eight miles ahead of *Warspite*, and the Battle Squadron and *Eagle* ten miles astern of the Commander-in-Chief. The Italian Fleet, steering north at 15 knots, was disposed in four columns spaced about five miles apart. The port wing column of five or six cruisers including some 8-inch *Bolzano*-class ships, the next of two or three cruisers ahead of the two battleships *Conte di Cavour* and *Giulio Cesare*, the third of four cruisers, probably 8-inch gun ships, and the starboard wing column of four 6-inch gun cruisers. A number of destroyers—probably three flotillas—were in the van, while others screened the battleships.

It was a brilliantly sunny afternoon, with few clouds in a blue sky. A moderate northerly wind raised a slight sea, and the atmosphere was bright, with visibility of 15 to 20 miles. One of *Stuart's* company recorded his impressions of the inspiring picture made by the fleet.

In the perfect visibility, blue sea and cloudless sky, the cruisers on the wing, and the destroyers in semi-circular formation screening in front of the battleships, made a picture no one who saw it can ever forget. . . . A few flags would flutter up to

the flagship's yardarm and answering pendants to the yardarms of the other ships. Then, in unison, down would come the flagship's signal and the answering pendants and over all helms would go together, and the fleet would alter course like so many well drilled soldiers, the destroyers leaning over with the sea screaming from their bows, the battleships, more ponderous, but not the less spectacular, moving more slowly around in their restricted circle to take up their new course.

Stuart, hitherto with the 7th Cruiser Squadron, was at 2.35 ordered to join the screen of *Royal Sovereign*. *Eagle*, acting independently, was screened by *Voyager* and *Vampire*, and was joined by *Gloucester*, withdrawn from the cruiser squadron as unfit to engage in serious action by reason of her bomb damage the previous day. At the time of sighting the enemy, the 7th Cruiser Squadron therefore consisted of only four 6-inch gun ships. They were ten miles 260 degrees from *Warspite*, formed on a line of bearing 320 degrees, and steering west at 18 knots.

Sydney sighted smoke broad on the port bow at 2.45 and seven minutes later *Neptune* reported two vessels bearing S.W. by W. distant about 16 miles. In *Sydney* the first sighting of enemy ships, apparently five cruisers, was at one minute after 3 o'clock. Seven minutes later, for the first time since the Napoleonic wars, the sighting of an enemy battle fleet in the Mediterranean was signalled when *Neptune* reported the two Italian battleships bearing W.S.W., 15 miles. The 7th Cruiser Squadron hauled round to north, and at 3.10 to north-east, to avoid getting too heavily engaged until *Warspite* was in a position to give support. The nearest enemy cruisers, in the third column, opened fire at 3.14 at a range of 23,600 yards. At 3.20 the 7th Cruiser Squadron was steering N.E. by N.—with "A" arcs open—at 25 knots, and two minutes later *Neptune* and *Liverpool* opened fire at a range of 22,100 yards, followed by *Sydney* whose target, a cruiser of the *Zara* class, was at a range of 23,000 yards. The speed of the squadron was increased to 28 knots.

With the advantage of the sun behind him, the enemy's shooting was good for range in the initial stages, and the outnumbered British cruisers came under heavy fire and were straddled several times, but neither side scored hits. Meanwhile the enemy advanced forces were sighted from *Warspite*, who opened fire in support of the 7th Cruiser Squadron, and at 3.25 released her destroyer screen, which formed single line ahead on *Nubian*, worked round to the south-eastward, and proceeded towards the van on the disengaged side. Ten salvos were fired at the Italian cruisers by *Warspite*, and at 3.30 the enemy turned away making smoke, and fire was checked.

Malaya and *Royal Sovereign*, away astern, were striving to catch up and get into the fight, and at this stage *Warspite* turned through 360 degrees to enable them to overtake, and Tovey altered course to conform. Between 3.33 and 3.36 the flagship fired four salvos at each of two 6-inch gun cruisers of the enemy starboard wing column which were apparently trying to work to the eastward to get at *Eagle*, then about to fly off a striking force. At 3.51 Tovey, steering N.W. to close the enemy again, was three and a half miles ahead of *Warspite*, who was steering

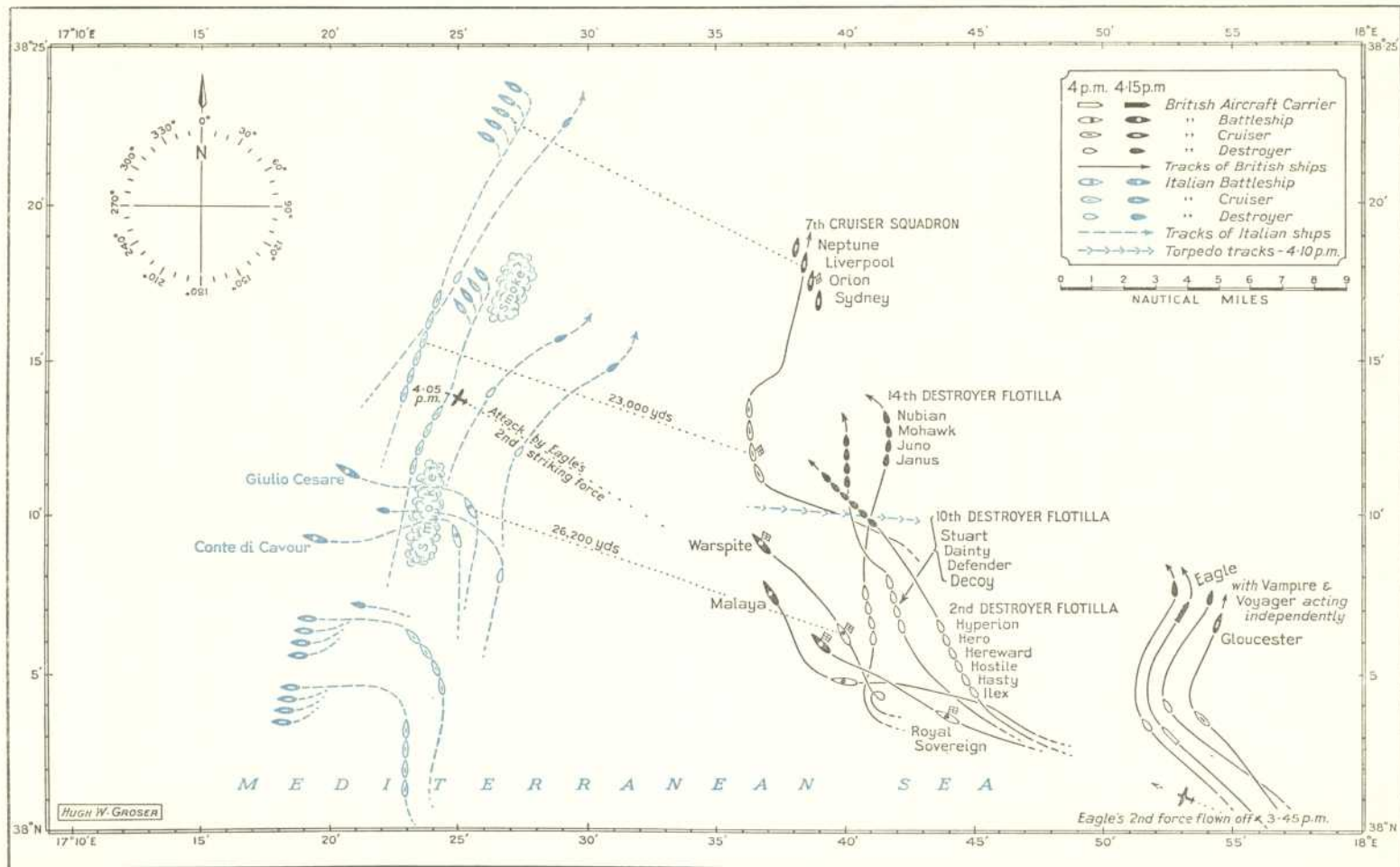
N.N.W. *Malaya* was in station on a bearing of 180 degrees from the flagship. *Royal Sovereign* had gained, but could not achieve the speed necessary to bring her into the action.

By this time the Battle Squadron had also released its destroyer screen, and all the destroyers—which, with the exception of *Vampire* and *Voyager*, who were with *Eagle*, had been ordered at 3.45 to join the 7th Cruiser Squadron—were concentrating in flotillas on the disengaged bow of the battle fleet. Passing to the eastward of *Warspite* at 3.54 some of them were narrowly missed by heavy shells from the enemy battleships, which had come into action against *Warspite* a minute earlier.

This was the decisive five minutes of the action. The flagship, target of both enemy battleships and straddled but not hit, concentrated her fire on the right hand enemy vessel—the *Giulio Cesare*. *Malaya* tried to join in. She fired in all eight salvos at extreme range, but all fell short. *Royal Sovereign*, though her engines were driven to the limit, could not keep pace with the tide of battle. At 4 o'clock *Warspite* straddled her target, and a hit at the base of the foremost funnel was observed. The effect was immediate. The enemy started to alter away and make smoke. *Warspite* altered course to the southward—to N.W.—in an endeavour to close, but at four minutes past four ceased fire, the targets being obscured.

From now on destroyer activity predominated; the enemy flotillas shielding the retirement of the Italian Fleet with smoke screens and torpedo attacks, and the British counter-attacking. At five minutes past four—at which time *Eagle's* striking force attacked a *Bolzano* cruiser, and believed it obtained at least one hit—enemy destroyers were seen from *Warspite* moving across to starboard from the Italian van, and two destroyer salvos landed close to *Stuart*. By this time Senior Captain (D) in *Nubian* had re-formed the flotillas on course N. by W. in the order: 14th Flotilla, *Nubian*, *Mohawk*, *Juno*, *Janus*; 2nd Flotilla, *Hyperion*, *Hero*, *Hereward*, *Hostile*, *Hasty* and *Ilex*, in single line ahead 25 knots, on bearing 140 degrees from *Nubian*; 10th Flotilla, *Stuart*, *Dainty*, *Defender* and *Decoy*, in single line ahead 27 knots, on bearing 220 degrees from *Nubian*. At this stage the Italian destroyers fired torpedoes at long range, the tracks of three or more passing close to the 14th Flotilla. At 4.14 the British destroyers, then four miles east-north-east of *Warspite* and turning to the north-west, were ordered to counter-attack. They swung round to west and increased to 29 knots to close. Each flotilla manoeuvred as necessary to clear the others, and keep their lines of fire open. It was *Stuart's* moment. With her battle ensign streaming from the foremast and the Australian flag at the main, the oldest destroyer in the action, she was in the van when speed was increased to 30 knots at 4.17, and was the first to open fire two minutes later; her opening salvo, at a range of 12,600 yards, appearing to score a hit. The 2nd and 14th Flotillas opened fire shortly afterwards, and the 7th Cruiser Squadron also engaged the enemy destroyers.

It was the closing phase of the action; the Italian Fleet retiring behind its concealing smoke screens, its destroyers dodging in and out of the



Battle of Calabria—the Decisive Phase

smoke and making half-hearted gun and torpedo attacks, and the British forces firing spasmodically as targets appeared and disappeared. During this period, when the enemy destroyers were laying heavy smoke to cover the retiring main forces, *Sydney* was one of the ships to bring effective fire to bear on a smoke-laying destroyer which suffered many severe hits in the ten minutes or so in which she bore the brunt of the attack.

By 4.41 the Italian destroyer flotillas had followed the main forces into the very effective smoke screens which concealed a large sector of the western horizon. The Commander-in-Chief considered it unwise, and playing the enemy's own game, to plunge blindly into this smoke, and course was altered to the northward and windward to get round it. The destroyer flotillas were clear of the smoke by 5 o'clock, but by then the sea was clear of ships to the western horizon, and the enemy was out of sight from the fleet.

The Italians were, however, observed from *Warspite's* aircraft in considerable confusion, making off at high speed to the south-west and westward towards Port Augusta and the Strait of Messina. Not until an hour had passed had they sorted themselves out and assumed formation. They were attacked—but apparently not hit—by their own bombers at 5.5 and at 6.57. When last seen by *Warspite's* aircraft, at five minutes past seven, they were about ten miles off Cape Spartivento, steering south-west at 18 knots.

With the conclusion of the gun action the Mediterranean Fleet came under heavy air bombardment from high flying bombers of the Italian Air Force. *Eagle*, *Gloucester*, and their two destroyers had been objects of attack much earlier, and were bombed at approximately fifteen-minute intervals from 3 p.m. for about five hours. The main fleet was left alone in the initial stages, but attention was paid to it from 4.41 onwards, five attacks being made on *Warspite* between then and 7.11 p.m., while the 7th Cruiser Squadron and the destroyers were also bombed. There were numerous near misses but no hits, and the ships suffered no damage. In the Western Mediterranean Force "H" was also heavily bombed. *Ark Royal* was near-missed several times, and the risk to her caused Somerville to abandon the attack on Cagliari. At 10.15 p.m. on the 9th, having fulfilled the object of creating a diversion during the Mediterranean Fleet's operation, Force "H" was withdrawn. During its return passage to Gibraltar, the destroyer *Escort* was torpedoed on the 11th July by a submarine, and sank later.

For some time after clearing the Italian smoke, and in spite of the enemy bombing, the Mediterranean Fleet held on to the westward, until the coast of Calabria was sighted, distant 25 miles, at 5.35 p.m., when course was altered to S.S.W. By 6.30 it was clear that the Italians had no intention of resuming the fight and could not be intercepted, and course was altered to S.S.E. to open the land, and an hour later there was a further change to the south-eastward.

That night and the following day the fleet cruised south of Malta, and the destroyers were sent in by groups to fuel. *Stuart*, in the first group,

reached Malta with only fifteen tons remaining. *Decoy*, *Vampire* and *Voyager* went in with the second group and reached Malta in the late afternoon of the 10th, during an air raid warning. *Vampire's* passenger found Grand Harbour

the strangest place I'd ever seen. . . . The place was still. Save for the faint throb of our own engines and the distant hum of a lonely Gloster-Gladiator fighter high over Luca there was not a sound. Everyone had gone to ground. Valetta to our right and the Three Cities to our left were cities of the dead. . . . Nothing moved. On the still empty waters of the harbour and the creeks there was no life. The great walls, ramps and bastions reared their massive stone in complete silence. The lofty Barracas were deserted, the ancient steps untrodden.¹

By then Convoy MF.1 had gone. It had sailed, escorted by *Diamond*, *Jervis*, and *Vendetta* (now commanded by Lieut-Commander Rhoades²) at 11 p.m. on the 9th, and was joined by *Stuart* and *Gloucester* as additional escort. MS.1 sailed on the 10th, escorted by *Decoy*, *Vampire*, and *Voyager*. Cover of both convoys was provided by the fleet on passage to Alexandria. Again all forces, and the convoys, were targets for heavy air attacks. It was in one of these, an unseen attack on convoy MS.1 in the forenoon of the 11th, that occurred the first fatal casualty in an Australian ship in the war. *Vampire* was straddled by a salvo of bombs and Commissioned Gunner Endicott³ was mortally wounded by splinters. *Vampire* closed *Warspite*—now screened by *Nubian*, *Mohawk*, *Juno* and *Janus*—to find better accommodation for the wounded man, and he was transferred to *Mohawk*, where he died that night. *Vampire* remained on *Warspite's* screen, her place with the convoy being taken by *Janus*.⁴

The remainder of the passage to Alexandria was made without damage from repeated air attacks which continued until the ships closed the Egyptian coast and came under fighter protection. *Warspite*, the 7th Cruiser Squadron, and screening destroyers, entered harbour at 6 a.m. on the 13th July, and convoy MF.1 three hours later. The Rear-Admiral, 3rd Cruiser

¹ Gerard, p. 40.

² In March 1940 Lt-Cdr Cant, who had commissioned *Vendetta* from reserve, relinquished command to return to Australia to stand by the "corvettes" under construction. He was succeeded for a few weeks by Lt J. Smallwood, RN, and in Apr 1940 Rhoades assumed command. *Vendetta* had started a refit at Malta on the 11 Jun. While she was at Malta, from 11 Jun to 9 Jul, the island was bombed on nearly eighty occasions. Air raids made it necessary that only the most essential items of refitting were carried out, and a ventilating system which had been projected was not completed. The ship's company was employed generally in dockyard defence, the torpedo party being engaged in fitting charges for demolition of the dockyard should that be necessary. The Vice-Admiral, Malta, signalled to Waller regarding *Vendetta's* work at Malta: "The amount of good work of every description done by Lt-Comm. Rhoades and the ship's company of *Vendetta* since war broke out with Italy has been beyond praise. They have turned their hands to everything in true Australian fashion and produced astonishing results. I am proud of these units of my old squadron. Please repeat this signal to C-in-C when you are next in V/S touch with him."

Capt R. Rhoades, DSC; RAN. In *Vampire* at outbreak of war. Comd HMAS *Vendetta* 1940-41, HMAS *Quickmatch* 1942-44, New Entry School, FND, 1944-45. Of Sydney; b. Double Bay, NSW, 8 Apr 1909.

³ Cd Gnr (T) J. H. Endicott, RN; lent to RAN from 1 Jan 1938. B. 12 May 1908. Died of wounds, 11 Jul 1940.

⁴ The lack of efficient anti-aircraft armament was a serious disability of the Australian destroyers at this period. Cdr Walsh commented on this incident: "The blast effect when straddled blew everybody on the upper deck and bridge flat, some ratings finding themselves some yards from where they had been standing. The moral effect of the bombing was negligible until the straddle occurred on July 11, after which there were signs of irritation at not being able to reply and a slight nervousness when the penetrating power of the splinters was observed." *Vampire* was holed in several places in the superstructure, bridge, boats, and funnels, and had five holes in the hull, including two under water.

Squadron in *Capetown*, and *Caledon*, had previously sailed to meet convoy MS.1; and *Ramillies* with four destroyers—including *Vendetta*—left harbour on the morning of the 13th to give additional cover. *Eagle* and the battle squadron reached Alexandria at 8.15 on the morning of the 14th July, and the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, *Ramillies*, convoy MS.1 and escort, entered harbour twenty-four hours later.

Operation MA.5 was successful in its objects of covering the Malta convoys and of bringing the enemy to action. The meeting with the Italian Fleet, although "the meagre material results" were, as Cunningham later wrote, "naturally very disappointing to me and all under my command", was of considerable moral value. It showed the calibre of the fleet and its Commander-in-Chief. Cunningham, although he believed that the Italian Fleet's movements were covering those of an important convoy to Libya (actually they were covering a convoy of five large ships, as was learned after the war), was also aware that there might be a deliberate attempt to entice him into an engagement in Italian waters where the enemy would have superiority in surface forces, proximity to bases, and the support of submarines and a powerful air force. He was aware that, as a result of the continued bombing attacks on the 8th July, his opponent should have an accurate knowledge of his strength, whereas he himself had not the same certainty regarding the Italian forces, only knowing that they were superior in numbers and speed. He knew that the Italians could mount air attacks greatly in excess of those he could stage from *Eagle*, "this obsolescent aircraft carrier, with only 17 Swordfish embarked"; and in the bomb on *Gloucester* on the 8th he had an example of what one hit could do to make a valuable unit unfit to engage in serious action. He accepted the odds, and the possibility he envisaged of the enemy's hope to draw him into an engagement under conditions in which those odds could be exploited to the full. As he said:

If these were, in fact, the enemy's intentions, he was not altogether disappointed, but the submarines, if there were any in the vicinity of the action, did not materialise, and fortunately for us, his air attacks failed to synchronise with the gun action.

The disparity in strength was considerable. The Mediterranean Fleet of three battleships, five cruisers, sixteen destroyers and an aircraft carrier, was opposed by two battleships, sixteen cruisers, and thirty-six destroyers. The British battleships mounted twenty-four 15-inch and thirty-two 6-inch guns against the twenty 12.6-inch and twenty-four 4.7-inch guns of the two Italian vessels, but this favourable balance was offset by the fact that *Malaya* and *Royal Sovereign* could not get within range of the enemy. In numbers of 8-inch guns the Italian cruisers perhaps exceeded the forty-eight 6-inch guns of the five British cruisers—twelve of which guns, in *Gloucester*, were not used in the main action—while they had an even greater number of 6-inch guns in addition. In reputed speeds the Italian battleships had an advantage of two to three knots over *Warspite* and *Malaya*, and five knots over *Royal Sovereign*; and with the exception of the four *Zaras*, the Italian cruisers were from two to four knots faster than the British. Ship for ship, the destroyers were practically equally matched

in speed and armament. The Italians had no aircraft carrier, but had great aerial superiority with shore-based bombers working from nearby airfields. With Malta under frequent air attack, Cunningham was 700 miles from a dependable fleet base, but within easy distance of the Italian Fleet were Taranto, Messina, Augusta, Syracuse, Palermo and Naples, offering shelter to damaged ships, and all submarine bases.

The outcome lay in the difference in character of the opponents. The will to fight, present in the British fleet, was lacking in the Italian; and, obsessed with the idea of their lack in building materials and resources, the Italians were reluctant to risk the loss of ships. The "disorder" in the Italian High Command, of which Admiral Cavagnari had previously complained to Ciano, was evident in the lack of naval and air cooperation. On the day of the action there was no sign of Italian aircraft earlier than the bombing attacks on *Eagle* at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Four days after the battle, Ciano recorded in his *Diary*:

The real controversy in the matter of naval conflicts is not between us and the British but between our aviation and our navy. Admiral Cavagnari maintains that our air action was completely lacking during the first phase of the encounter but that when it finally came it was directed against our own ships, which for six hours withstood the bombardment of our airplanes. Other information also gives the lie to the glowing reports of our air force. I confess that I am incredulous too. Mussolini, on the other hand, is not. Today he said that within three days the Italian Navy has annihilated fifty per cent of the British naval potential in the Mediterranean. Perhaps this is somewhat exaggerated.

This Italian weakness for optimistic exaggeration tended to lead them into grave misconceptions. The Rome News Bulletin of the 10th July gave an account of damage inflicted on the British Fleet on the 8th: "several enemy ships being struck, some set on fire, and one sunk." If such claims were believed, and were not mere propaganda for civilian consumption, the sudden appearance of an undamaged fleet on the 9th may well have misled the Italian admiral as to its actual strength, and weighted the indecision which was so often apparent in the Italian commanders in the face of an enemy.

In both gun and bomb attacks the Italians fought at long range. Cunningham, commenting on this, remarked on the difficulty of hitting with guns at long range, and "the necessity of closing in, when this can be done, in order to get decisive results". For that reason he thought

Warspite's hit on one of the enemy battleships at 26,000 yards range might perhaps be described as a lucky one. Its tactical effect was to induce the enemy to turn away and break off the action, which was unfortunate, but strategically it probably has had an important effect on the Italian mentality.

Similarly, the bomb hit on *Gloucester*, at extreme range, could be described as lucky. The difficulty of hitting in high-level bombing was shown by the meagre results achieved by large-scale attack during several hours. As an indication of that scale, Walsh estimated that a total of 1,350 bombs were aimed at ships screened by *Vampire*, and at *Vampire*, during the five days from the 8th to the 12th July, without one hit, although

Vampire was straddled on the 11th. These operations showed, wrote Cunningham on the 29th January 1941 (a date, it should be noted, before the close-range dive bomber had appeared in the Mediterranean in force) that high level bombing, even on the heavy and accurate scale experienced, yields few hits and that it is more alarming than dangerous. Finally, these operations and the action off Calabria produced throughout the fleet a determination to overcome the air menace and not to let it interfere with our freedom of manoeuvre and hence our control of the Mediterranean.

The moral value to the Mediterranean Fleet was reflected in London. There the Mediterranean naval situation had appeared so formidable following the collapse of France, that the Admiralty had contemplated the abandonment of the Eastern Basin and concentration at Gibraltar.⁵ This idea was opposed by Churchill and was rejected, and on the 3rd July a British Chiefs of Staff paper stressed the importance of the Middle East as a war theatre, and recognised the possibility of a German attack on Egypt, but expressed the view that, so long as the fleet could be retained in the Eastern Mediterranean, the existing British forces were enough to deal with purely local attack. The effect of air attack on the fleet was being watched in London, and on the 12th July, while operation MA.5 was still in progress, Admiral Pound told Churchill:

We have gained experience of the air conditions in the Western Mediterranean, and as soon as the present operation on which the Eastern Fleet is employed is completed we shall know pretty well what we are faced with in the Eastern Mediterranean. There is no doubt that both Force "H" and the Eastern Mediterranean Fleet work under a grave disadvantage, inasmuch as it is not possible to give them fighter protection as we do in the North Sea when ships are in the bombing area.

In the light of the knowledge gained, Admiralty policy regarding the Mediterranean was carefully scrutinised, and no doubt the successful outcome of operation MA.5 influenced the decision—reiterated in a signal to Cunningham on the 15th July—to maintain a strong force in the Eastern Mediterranean, charged with the task of destroying the enemy naval forces although these had a numerical preponderance. At the same time the Commander-in-Chief was invited to say what heavy ships he considered necessary for the forces in both the Western and Eastern Mediterranean. He asked that *Valiant* and *Barham* should join him in the east—thus enabling him to dispense with *Royal Sovereign*, a constant source of anxiety because of her poor deck protection and inferior speed—together with the aircraft carrier *Illustrious*,⁶ and two 8-inch gun cruisers; and agreed that *Hood*, *Ark Royal*, and one or two "R" class battleships would suffice in the west. With these forces he considered that the Mediterranean could be dominated and the eastern basin held indefinitely, provided that Malta was adequately protected by fighters and that his resources at Alexandria were built up.

⁵ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol II (1949), p. 390.

⁶ HMS *Barham*, battleship (1915), 31,100 tons, eight 15-in and eight 6-in guns, 25 kts; sunk by enemy submarine in E Mediterranean, 25 Nov 1941.

HMS *Illustrious*, aircraft carrier (1940), 23,000 tons, sixteen 4.5-in guns, over 60 aircraft, 31 kts.

X

While these plans for reinforcement were formulating, the Italians suffered another reverse in the Eastern Mediterranean in an action in which *Sydney* played the leading role, following a brief spell in Alexandria after her return from operation MA.5 on the 13th July. On the 14th and 15th of the month she was busy fuelling and ammunitioning ship. On the 16th and 17th she was in the floating dock—and the resulting clean bottom was to be an asset in the next couple of days.

In the afternoon of the 17th July two signals were sent by Tovey to ships in Alexandria. One, to Commander Nicolson⁷ in *Hyperion*, directed him to take with him *Ilex*, *Hero*, and *Hasty* of his 2nd Flotilla, and sweep north of Crete from east to west. The object of the operation was the destruction of Italian submarines. The second signal was to Captain Collins in *Sydney*, directing him to take *Havock*⁸ under his command and proceed north of Crete east about, to support Nicolson's destroyer force, and also to intercept Italian ships in the Gulf of Athens—this second objective taking him considerably farther north than the destroyers. The two forces were to pass through Kaso Strait, east of Crete, within half an hour of each other on the night of the 18th July, and to leave the Aegean by the Antikithera Channel to the west of Crete the following day, the destroyers to pass through this channel at 6 a.m. on the 19th—the selection of this hour proved to be of importance—some six hours ahead of *Sydney*, who would at that time be in the Gulf of Athens.

As was learned after the war from Italian sources, at about the time the foregoing instructions were issued in Alexandria, Vice-Admiral Ferdinando Casardi, in command of a division of two cruisers of the Italian Navy, received instructions to sail from Tripoli to Leros in the Dodecanese Islands. He was flying his flag in *Giovanni delle Bande Nere*,⁹ and had her sister ship *Bartolomeo Colleoni*¹⁰—Captain Umberto Navaro—in company. His orders were to steer for a point thirty miles north of Derna, and thence proceed on a course of 12 degrees for the Antikithera Channel, through which he was to pass at 6 a.m. on the 19th July.

The Italian cruisers left Tripoli at 9 p.m. on the 17th, and were off Derna at 10 the following night, when they altered course to cross the Mediterranean. At six next morning, steaming on a line of bearing and zigzagging at 25 knots, they were in the southern entrance to the Antikithera Channel.

Hyperion and her consorts passed the boom at Alexandria a few minutes after midnight on the 17th July, zigzagged at 16 knots across the Mediterranean, and passed through Kaso Strait at the appointed time. Throughout the night of the 18th-19th they steamed westward along the northern

⁷ Capt H. St L. Nicolson, CBE, DSO; RN. (*King George V* 1917-19.) Comd HMS *Hyperion* 1938-40, HMS *Ilex* and Capt (D) 2 Destroyer Flotilla 1940-42; CSO to FOC Dover 1943-44; with British Pacific Fleet 1945. B. 11 Apr 1899.

⁸ HMS *Havock*, destroyer (1937), 1,340 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; grounded, total loss, off Tunisia, 6 Apr 1942.

⁹ *Giovanni delle Bande Nere*, Italian cruiser (1931), 5,069 tons, eight 6-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 37 kts; sunk by HM submarine *Urge*, 22-23 Mar 1942.

¹⁰ *Bartolomeo Colleoni*, Italian cruiser (1931), 5,069 tons, eight 6-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 37 kts; sunk NW of Crete, 19 Jul 1940.

coast of Crete without incident, seeing only the bonfires of shepherds in the mountains. Sunrise found them on a westerly course in the northern entrance to the Antikithera Channel, hugging the Cretan side with the nearest ship barely four miles from Cape Spada, the others spaced at intervals of one and a half miles to the northward of her.

Sydney, with *Havock* in company, sailed from Alexandria at 4.30 a.m. on the 18th, and made a landfall off Crete at sunset that day. By 11.45 p.m. she had cleared Kaso Strait, and zigzagged under a full moon on a mean course W.N.W., speed of advance 18 knots. This course carried her to the northward of the destroyers, but not so far north as she might have been. During the passage from Alexandria, Collins had decided to concentrate on his first objective—the support of the destroyers—at the expense of his second; and to remain to the southward until 8 a.m. on the 19th—by which time Nicolson's division should have cleared the Antikithera Channel—when he intended to make a short sweep northwards towards the Gulf of Athens. In the light of the early sun brightening the high morning mist of a calm and cloudless day, *Sydney*, still steering west-north-westerly, was some forty miles north of the destroyers—less than half the distance she would have been had Collins not decided to remain in their support.

The Italian cruiser and British destroyer divisions sighted each other about 7.20 a.m. on the 19th.¹ A sighting might have been made earlier had either *Sydney* or the Italians catapulted aircraft. *Sydney* could not do so since her amphibian, lost after the bombardment of Bardia, had not then been replaced. Admiral Casardi had aircraft, but did not catapult them because he assumed that Egeomil—the Italian Headquarters at Rhodes—would by that time have assured reconnaissance over the sea areas which he had to cross; and because “the conditions of weather would not have permitted catapulting aircraft with any degree of safety”.² The opposing forces had opposing views of the weather conditions. Casardi experienced “strong wind from N.W., sea very rough”. An observer in *Hyperion* enjoyed “an Aegean idyll of silver sea and sky, grey ships and whispering bow waves”. Collins, forty miles away, found dawn ushering in “a calm and cloudless day”.

In *Hyperion* the ship's company had just been fallen out from dawn action stations, and the smell of breakfast bacon was floating up the bridge voice pipes, when the starboard bridge lookout said: “Two cruisers on the starboard bow, sir,” adding “and they're Italian, too.” The Italian ships bore W.S.W.—fine on the bow, for the destroyers were steering a little to the southward of that—and were about ten miles off heading S.S.E. With alarm bells clanging the destroyers swung away to a north-easterly course

¹ In the Italian report the times used are Zone minus one hour—an hour earlier than the British. Thus the Italian sighting of the destroyers is given as 0617/19, the destroyers' sighting of the cruisers as 0722/19. For the sake of clarity the British time is used here, the Italian being adjusted accordingly by the addition of one hour. Even so, there are occasional differences of three or four minutes in the two accounts.

² It was stated after the action by a prisoner from *Bartolomeo Colleoni* that at about 5 a.m. an attempt was made to fly off an aircraft from that ship, but this was not done owing (he believed) to a mechanical breakdown.

under full rudder as battle ensigns were hoisted, an enemy report was made by wireless, and speed was increased to 30 knots. During the turn away, *Hyperion* and *Ilex*, nearest the Italians, opened fire; but their shells fell far short.

In the leading Italian cruiser, *Bande Nere*, the destroyers, sighted on the port bow, were assumed to be a screen searching ahead of heavier ships. Casardi increased speed to 30 knots and turned his division to port through 180 degrees to a northerly course, diverging from that of the destroyers and thus opening the range. *Bande Nere* opened fire at 7.27 a.m. on *Hyperion* and *Ilex*.³

Beyond visual range, the course of this initial encounter was being followed with interest. Away to the north, Collins received *Hyperion's* enemy report at 7.33 a.m., and immediately altered course towards. Three minutes later an amplifying signal from *Hyperion* gave him the destroyers' position, course and speed, and *Sydney* and *Havock* swung farther to the southward to south by west and worked up to full speed, racing over the smooth sea towards the nearest point of interception of the destroyers. Nicolson was not aware of *Sydney's* proximity, and, thinking her farther to the northward, anticipated no support in his unequal fight before 9 o'clock at the earliest. At this stage Collins—who had not been sighted by aircraft since leaving Alexandria, and was anxious to conceal his presence from the Italians lest they broke off the engagement and doubled back through the Antikithera Channel—kept wireless silence, so that Nicolson was left hopeful but in the dark.

In Alexandria, Cunningham was also unaware of *Sydney's* position. On receipt of *Hyperion's* enemy report he signalled to Nicolson to join *Sydney*, and to Collins to support Nicolson; but for the first hour the only picture he got was the partial one built up from Nicolson's brief reports of his course and speed.

Collins had the fullest picture—of the Italian cruisers (though he did not know what type, and whether 8-inch or 6-inch gun ships) and Nicolson's destroyers on roughly parallel north-easterly courses, and of *Sydney* and *Havock* on a southerly course trending south-easterly as the situation developed; with each force racing at 30 knots towards a point of intersection which they should reach in about an hour. His decision to keep it to himself could not have been an easy one to make. He knew that Nicolson would be concerned at his silence and was also aware of a risk that they might miss each other, since Nicolson would think him to be much farther north than he was. But *Hyperion's* signals kept him informed of the movements of the destroyers and of the enemy, and allowed him to adjust his course accordingly. In the event, the surprise achieved was most valuable, and may well have led to the eventual outcome of the engagement. In the meantime, the brief approach period was well used in *Sydney*, and the ship's company had time for a hurried breakfast and to clean into battle dress before being closed up to action stations.

³ Casardi's account, in his official report to the Ministry of Marine, Rome, which says the destroyers did not reply until 7.32, after *Bande Nere's* fifth salvo. A British account, on the other hand, says the destroyers opened fire first.

On board *Bande Nere*, Admiral Casardi had his own problems. He was concerned to manoeuvre so as to keep at the limit of the destroyers' gun range "and to avoid the chance of an effective torpedo attack", and thus for the first twenty-five minutes or so he steered north or northerly, the range opening as the destroyers were steering north-easterly. The Italian anticipation of a torpedo attack caused them to see one

launched at 7.43 a.m. at a range of about 20,000 yards with an inclination of about 75 degrees, the tracks of the torpedoes being observed far off and to starboard.

This must have been an optical illusion, as the destroyers fired no torpedoes at this stage of the action, and, well outside the range of their own 4.7-inch guns, could do nothing except dodge and

watch the fall of the Italian shot—an unpleasant pastime since the Italians frequently had the range, but were unaccountably out of line.

The Italian gunners were firing against the sun at long range, and in those circumstances were experiencing that low rate of hitting to be expected in the conditions of a chase in failing light of small vessels dodging and making smoke, which had been the lot of the 7th Cruiser Squadron chasing the destroyers some days earlier. But in this instance the rate was at zero; a condition which could no doubt have been altered had the cruisers, with their margin of speed of at least two knots over the destroyers, closed the range. This they made no attempt to do for some time. Indeed when, shortly after a quarter to eight, Nicolson altered course to north in an endeavour to head the enemy in that direction, the Italians—to his surprise—conformed for some minutes.

It was about this time, according to an observer in *Hyperion*, that the action hurtled past an old Greek freighter

rolling slowly through the calm water. . . . Her crew, alarmed at this most Olympian disturbance of the morning's peace, left her, stopped and pulled clear in their boat. The wash of the passing warships lapped her sides and distorted her reflection in the mirror of the sea. The Greek sailors must have marvelled as they lay on their oars and watched, while the silence and calm of the Aegean was shattered by the shriek and spray of shells being hurled across ten miles of sea.

Just before 8 o'clock Casardi made up his mind to press the attack, and swung his division round to east. The range closed rapidly, but Nicolson held on to the north-east to keep the action moving in the general direction of *Sydney*, and the cruisers altered more to the north again, though keeping on a converging course. The destroyers were, wrote Casardi:

emitting smoke astern in an attempt to conceal their movements. From the beginning of their attack up to the moment when they drew out of sight the destroyers had scarcely been visible, either because of the mist or on account of the slanting rays of the sun. As a consequence, favoured more by natural conditions than by their own artificial though rather ineffectual smoke-screen, the destroyers, still being pursued by the cruisers, disappeared from view. From time to time they re-appeared very indistinctly and it was judged that they had again assumed a north-easterly course so as to cross our bows. The control of our gun fire was rendered very difficult on account of the bad conditions of visibility—particularly for the range-finders—especially when the destroyers were directly in line against the sun. It seemed that after the 12th salvo the leading destroyer, owing perhaps to having been hit, had

reduced speed and then turned away, falling somewhat astern of her sub-division. At 8.27 a.m. I asked Egeomil, Rhodes, to intervene with bombing aircraft; the enemy destroyers had disappeared in smoke, and my attempts to re-engage them with gun fire proved useless. Practically speaking, from 7.48 to 8.30, though continuing to chase the enemy at a speed of 32 knots, our fire was suspended.

Meanwhile *Sydney* and *Havock*, rushing down from the north, had altered course by successive changes to the eastward as the Italian pursuit of the destroyers moved in that direction across their front. At 8.20, *Sydney* was steering S.E. by E., when her lookouts sighted volumes of smoke on the southern horizon; and six minutes later the Italian cruisers were sighted about two points before the starboard beam, distant 23,000 yards and steering easterly. Collins flashed off an enemy report by wireless, thus bringing Cunningham and Nicolson into the picture. And at 8.29 *Sydney* opened fire on *Bande Nere*—the leader of the two cruisers—at a range of 20,000 yards.

The relative positions of the three forces at that moment were at the angles of a roughly equilateral triangle. The base, lying almost north and south, was the line of bearing between *Sydney* and *Bande Nere*; the two sides were the converging lines of advance of the opposing cruisers; and at the apex was Nicolson's destroyer division, right ahead of *Sydney*—but still invisible from her—and steering north-east.

Sydney's arrival was masked by a bank of haze which lay to the northward. Casardi's first intimation was when

at 8.30 several salvos fell near the *Bande Nere*, coming from our port side where a thick bank of low fog could be seen. It was only possible to distinguish the flashes of guns and not the hulls of the ships, nor their numbers.

To Nicolson, also, *Sydney's* approach was heralded by her gun flashes. *Hyperion's* observer recorded:

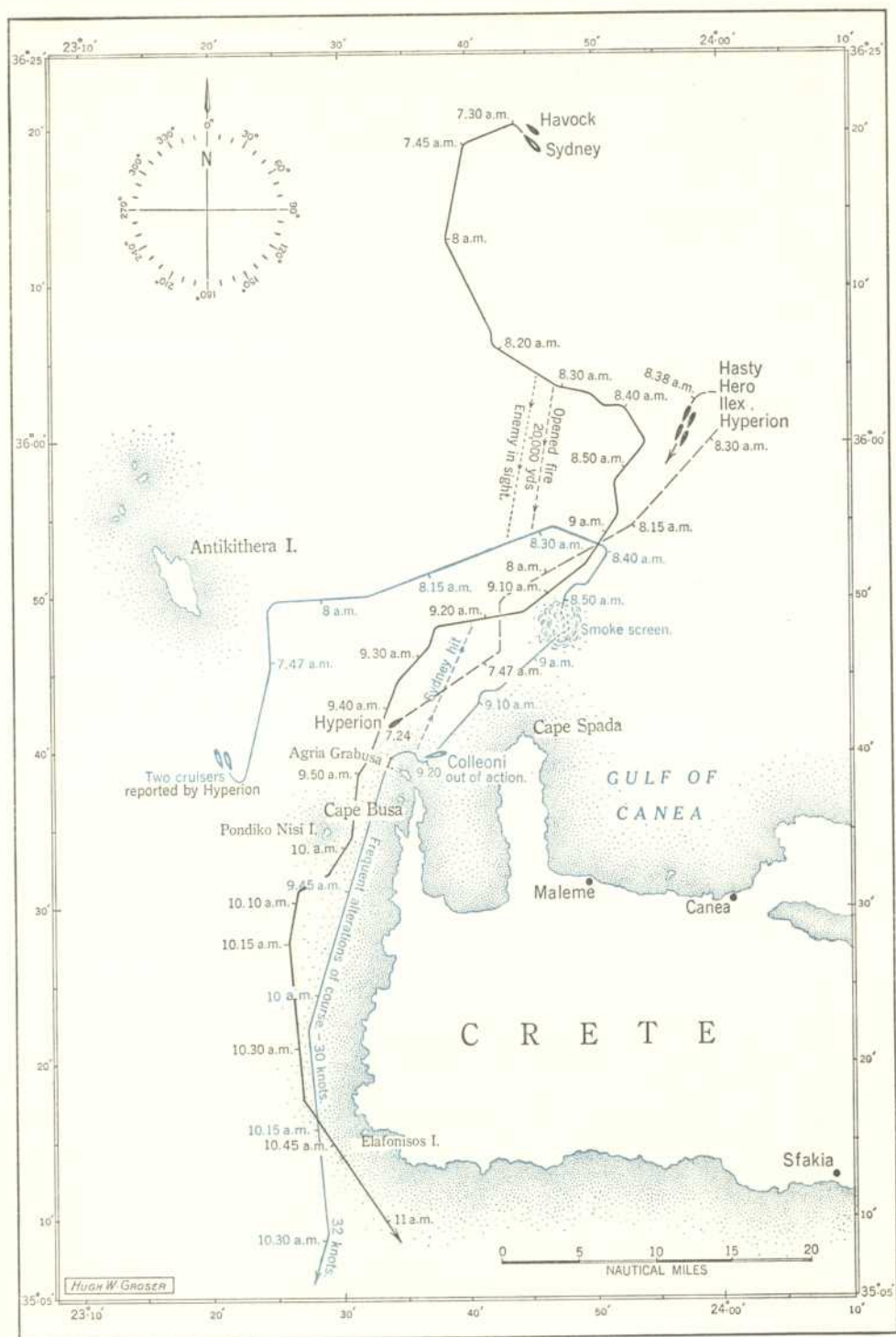
At 8.29 bridge lookouts in the destroyers—who could still discern nothing to the northward except the island of Milo, gradually taking shape over the haze—saw, on the port bow, the orange flashes of the *Sydney's* opening salvo—the most welcome sight in the world. She came rushing to the southward, on the port beam of the Italian, guns flashing, battle ensigns streaming, and such a smother of foam at bow and stern that from the destroyers one seemed almost to hear the high-tensioned scream of the machinery driving her across the water.

Collins was, as he later remarked, in the happy position of taking into action a ship that had already experienced two successful encounters with the enemy. He was not at this stage, however, aware whether he was tackling 8-inch or 6-inch gun cruisers. Nor was the destroyer division in sight, and he was watching for it with the idea of turning up close astern of it in support, having signalled his position, course and speed to Nicolson at 8.30.

The Italians opened fire at 8.32

with gun fire from all their turrets but without being able to distinguish clearly the enemy units, nor to get their range; but being guided solely by the flashes from the enemies' guns.

Sydney found the Italian fire fairly accurate, their salvos starting short and then falling mostly over, though some straddles were obtained. Collins



Cape Spada Action—Track Chart of H.M.A.S. Sydney

held on to his south-easterly course to close the enemy and intercept the destroyers, but Casardi, about the time of opening fire, turned away to the south-eastward to a roughly parallel course. At 8.35 *Sydney* scored her first hit on *Bande Nere*, a shell passing through the Italian's forward funnel and exploding on deck, where it killed four ratings and wounded four others.

By now Collins had the measure of his opponents, having with some relief identified them as *Colleoni* class cruisers, while he was even more pleased to observe the enemy making smoke,

which indicated to me that even in the early stage he was giving consideration to evasive tactics.

Meanwhile Nicolson, on sighting *Sydney's* gun flashes, had turned his destroyers through 180 degrees to a south-westerly course, anticipating an order to close and attack with torpedoes; and at 8.38 *Hyperion* was sighted from *Sydney* fine on the port bow steering to cross, with *Ilex*, *Hero*, and *Hasty* in company. *Havock* was detached from *Sydney* to join them, and Collins directed Nicolson to attack.

But by the time the signal was passed, Casardi had made a torpedo attack impracticable by turning 90 degrees to starboard to a south-westerly course. Collins followed him round, the course set by Nicolson enabling *Sydney* to turn towards the enemy abreast of the destroyers. Thus, wrote Collins,

by 8.46 the position was that *Sydney* with destroyers practically in line abreast and in fairly close order was steering on a south-westerly course after the enemy at full speed.

This was, Casardi reported later, the crucial moment of the action.

At 8.46 it became possible to distinguish through the mist that the enemy's force was composed of two large units which were recognised as two cruisers, though it was still not possible to obtain their range. During the course of the action it was possible to determine the cruisers as belonging to the *Sydney* or *Gloucester* class. My orders stated the object of the operation was to reach Leros. From the moment of meeting the enemy I considered that my task must be to engage him. In order to obtain the best tactical advantage arising from the speed of our cruisers I required space to manoeuvre freely, that is without the restrictions imposed on us by the area of combat. Therefore, from the first instant of combat with the enemy cruiser I had realised the necessity of drawing the enemy formation towards waters free from any land restrictions, for being composed of a greater number of vessels they could take advantage of the geographical configuration to prevent me disengaging from a critical position. Accordingly at 8.46, the crucial moment of the action, rather than continue towards Leros in pursuit of the enemy, I turned sharply to starboard to a track almost parallel to the enemy, bringing him into the largest sector of gun fire. This manoeuvre, given the tactical situation of the moment, also gave me the advantage of fighting from a position ahead and the chance to employ torpedoes. From 8.50 to 8.52 in order to lessen the effect of the enemy's fire I turned to port and at 8.53 to starboard, once again bringing the enemy into the maximum sector of fire. Only at one minute past nine for the first time was there a chance of obtaining a good range of the enemy ships, and *Bande Nere* and *Colleoni* recommenced firing with all turrets. During the period when, on account of the appearance of their cruisers, I had ceased chasing the destroyers, these latter were free to turn westward and join the larger units. As a result shortly after reopening the

battle, approximately at 9.10 a.m., the *Bande Nere* and *Colleoni* found themselves in action with six enemy vessels. The rolling caused by the heavy north-westerly swell rendered gunlaying very difficult, nevertheless our fire was as intense and well-directed as the enemies'. To escape their salvos which were very concentrated I made frequent small turns.

At the beginning of the chase of the Italian cruisers, range was 18,000 yards, and for a while it lengthened slightly. The Italian fire, though accurate, was of slow rate, which probably accounted for *Sydney's* not being hit at this stage. Collins altered course as necessary to open "A" arcs and to conform to the evasive alterations of the enemy, and shifted target from ship to ship as one or other of the Italians became obscured in smoke, and for half an hour or so the flight and pursuit tore noisily across the glittering sea, the Italian cruisers some ten miles ahead of their opponents. *Bande Nere*, about a mile ahead of *Colleoni*, was frequently obscured by smoke, so that the nearer ship increasingly became the target; and at 8.49 she came under the additional fire of the destroyers' 4.7-inch guns.

The haze had now lifted, and the first of the day breeze whipped the blue water into little waves whose spindrift pattered on the destroyers' forecastles. The smaller ships were driving all out, but could not draw ahead of *Sydney* to attack with torpedoes, and the pursuers raced in line abreast, the orange flashes of gun fire stabbing from their forward turrets, bright colours of bunting streaming from their signal halliards, and white wakes foaming and trailing astern.

At 8.53 Casardi, under cover of a smoke screen, appeared from *Sydney* to alter towards in succession to starboard—

I sought to improve conditions by emitting for a few minutes a curtain of artificial smoke, which resulted in the enemy's fire becoming irregular. After about four minutes I ceased to make smoke and turned decisively to starboard, followed by the *Colleoni*

—and then steadied on a south-westerly course, with the British force conforming. From 9.2 until she was again obscured by smoke *Bande Nere* was the target for *Sydney's* fire, but at 9.8 target was shifted to *Colleoni* at a range of 18,500 yards. For seven minutes *Sydney* fired with her forward turrets only, but at 9.15 Collins altered course thirty degrees to starboard and opened "A" arcs, and very shortly *Sydney's* fire on *Colleoni* appeared to be effective. The Italian ship lost speed, so that within four minutes the range had closed to 17,500 yards.

Sydney now came under fairly accurate fire, and at 9.21 suffered her only hit in the action. An enemy shell exploded on the port side of the forward funnel, about ten feet below the top, blew a hole three feet square in the funnel casings, and did minor damage with splinters. Only one slight casualty—a splinter wound—resulted.

But now *Colleoni* was far more severely hit. According to a prisoner's⁴ statement after the action, she had first been hit in the forecandle, but the

⁴ The prisoner was Engineer Lieutenant Gino Gallupini, who was in the engine room of the *Bartolomeo Colleoni* during the action. He was rescued from the water by *Hyperion*, and stated that with the damage resulting from the shell in the boiler room the crew of *Colleoni* "lost

decisive damage was caused about this time by one of *Sydney's* 6-inch shells which exploded in the boiler room, stopped the ship, and put the power hoists for the turrets out of action. The range of the *Colleoni* now closed rapidly, and she "became smothered in the large and smaller splashes of cruiser and destroyer shells". At 9.25 she was observed from *Sydney* to be stopped and apparently out of action in a position five miles W.S.W. of Cape Spada. *Bande Nere*, at this time well ahead of *Colleoni*, turned towards her pursuers at 9.21. But it was apparently evident to Casardi that he could now do nothing to help the stricken ship, and without easing her helm *Bande Nere* completed the circle of her turn and continued on a south-westerly course. By 9.26 she had rounded Agria Grabousa island at a distance of about one mile off shore, and cut down to the southward between the off-lying island of Pondikonisi and the west coast of Crete.

At 9.33 Collins directed Nicolson to torpedo *Colleoni*, and *Sydney* checked fire on her. The final range was 7,500 yards at 9.38, at which time a heavy explosion was observed forward on the Italian, who was on fire amidships. Superficially she appeared little damaged. The British shells had penetrated her thin plating and burst inside, and internal fires could be seen through shell holes. Her four turrets appeared undamaged, and were trained and laid on the starboard quarter. *Hyperion's* observer recorded that:

The Italian ensign still flew, just stirred in the breeze, from her peak, and astern of her, in the water, floated the vast majority of her ship's company.

There was some doubt on *Sydney's* bridge as to whether she struck her colours at this time or they were shot away. *Hyperion*, *Ilex* and *Havock* stood by to pick up survivors and sink the crippled ship, and signalling Nicolson to leave one destroyer to do that job and follow him with the other two, Collins, with *Hero* and *Hasty* in company, continued the chase of *Bande Nere*—some ten miles ahead—at 30 knots.

Casardi had watched the destruction of *Colleoni* from the Admiral's bridge of his flagship.

At 9.24 the *Colleoni*, which up to that moment had maintained perfect station and kept up a rapid and effective fire, reported damage to her engines, I think from a hit received in a vital part of the motor machinery. Almost simultaneously she stopped. For a few minutes, still following their action course, the enemy warships concentrated fire on her, except for one cruiser which continued to fire against the *Bande Nere*. From the admiral's bridge I witnessed the last glorious moments of the cruiser. For a few seconds she seemed to be surrounded by columns of water from the enemy's salvos. No one appeared on deck, all on board showed their extremely heroic will to fight by their calm, implacable behaviour. The inequality of the fight was, however, sadly evident; an explosion occurred in the bows due, probably, to the blowing up of the forward magazine. Immediately after, two very high

heart and the ship stopped firing. After this the ship was repeatedly hit, notably at the base of the bridge which put the control out of action and also set fire to ammunition for the H/A guns. This fire spread and soon involved the whole bridge. There was no damage on deck abaft the after funnel, but he saw numerous casualties and much damage in the forepart of the ship. The ship was abandoned soon after she was stopped, when a hit between the funnels started another fire."

According to another Italian account—that of Admiral Bernotti in *La Guerre sin mari*, p. 209—a 6-inch shell exploded in the after boiler room, causing damage on deck and amidships and killing members of the crews at A/A and machine-guns and torpedo tubes.

columns of water alongside the dying ship showed that torpedoes from the enemy destroyers, now at last near their prey, had struck. A huge cloud of mixed black and white smoke, then the glorious warship—her upper deck almost level with the water—heeled over to port and sank. Such was the epic end of the Royal cruiser *Bartolomeo Colleoni*.

When it was certain that she had been abandoned, *Colleoni* was torpedoed by *Ilex* and *Hyperion*, and sank at 9.59 (it was to starboard that she rolled over, not to port), and the three destroyers remained to rescue 545 Italians—51 of whom, including her commanding officer, Captain Umberto Navaro, were seriously wounded—from the water. *Sydney*, with ammunition running short in her forward turrets and for this reason withholding her fire, was racing with *Hero* and *Hasty* after *Bande Nere*, and at 9.49 Collins again signalled Nicolson to hurry and join him in the chase. *Bande Nere* kept up an intermittent fire from her after turrets but scored no hits, but *Sydney*, when she reopened fire with her forward turrets at 9.58, made a second hit on the Italian cruiser, Casardi telling that a shell from her

crossed the quarterdeck and entered "Zone 2" and exploded on the divisional bulkhead between "Zones 1 and 2", killing four ratings and wounding 12.

According to Casardi, *Bande Nere* had at this minute to shut off a boiler owing to defects in safety valves. Speed was reduced to 29 knots "and range began to lessen", though within a few minutes the ship was again making 32 knots. This lessening of range was not evident in *Sydney*; and *Hero*, leading the chase, reported to Collins: "Regret I am not catching her." *Sydney* found the range still opening, and the target and fall of shot becoming indistinct, yet continued the chase in the hope of obtaining a speed hit. But the Mediterranean haze, not noticeable north of Crete, combined with the enemy's smoke in making spotting conditions impossible. At 10.22 *Sydney* fired two salvos at 21,000 yards. Failure to observe the fall of shot showed that *Bande Nere* had drawn beyond the maximum range of splash visibility, and fire was finally checked. *Sydney* had by now only ten rounds of shell left in her forward turrets; the enemy, practically out of sight at a range of eleven miles, was hauling away at an estimated speed of 32 knots; and at 10.37 Collins, "with great reluctance", abandoned the chase, having been ordered by the Commander-in-Chief to return to Alexandria.

In *Warspite*, Cunningham had been following the action through the brief signals from the British ships, and must have felt both relief and concern at *Sydney's* report made at 10.5 a.m.: "One cruiser sunk. Ammunition practically finished.⁵ Other cruiser course 200 degrees am following."

The possibility of there being stronger Italian forces in the vicinity was an immediate consideration when Nicolson's first enemy report was received, and during the forenoon of the 19th the fleet put to sea from Alexandria and steered to the north-west. Two of the Australian destroyers were in this covering party, *Stuart* on *Warspite's* screen and *Vendetta* on

⁵ *Sydney* fired 956 rounds of 6-inch shell in this action, bringing her expenditure of ammunition from her main armament in action with the enemy during six weeks of war up to 2,200 rounds.

that of the battle squadron. The obvious concern of the enemy to evade in the early stages of the action had made Collins also consider the possibility of a desire to lead him on to stronger Italian forces near by; and the behaviour of *Bande Nere* in holding a southerly course in the open sea when escape to the westward would have been easier, strengthened this view; which was further supported by a signal from *Havock*, received by Collins shortly after noon, saying that prisoners had stated that strong Italian forces were in the neighbourhood.

But apparently no such forces were about. Casardi had intelligence of the fleet leaving Alexandria, and was practising a deception in steering south while in sight of his pursuers. At 10.22 *Sydney* had signalled to *Hero*, "Drop back on me. We have been ordered to return to harbour." Presumably in *Bande Nere*—where the conviction that the fifth British destroyer was a cruiser apparently persisted—*Hero's* falling back on *Sydney* was observed, for Casardi wrote of the final stages of the encounter:

At about 10.26, immediately after being straddled by one of our salvos, the leading enemy cruiser turned sharply to starboard and ceased fire. Very soon the range increased to 21,000 yards when all the enemy vessels ceased fire and broke contact. I think the enemy flagship had received a hit which caused her to stop, but it is certain that the *Bande Nere* continued to fire for some time after the enemy were silent. The other cruiser had desisted from continuing the chase alone after the *Bande Nere*, perhaps because she was only lightly built or had realised the impossibility of engaging us with our higher speed. For about one hour I steered towards Tobruk and when sure of being out of the enemy's sight I altered course for Benghazi to make sure of avoiding enemy naval forces, which had been reported leaving Alexandria.

In the event, the Mediterranean Fleet in its sweep to the north-westward found no enemy forces. Casardi's tactics led to the belief that *Bande Nere* was making for Tobruk. Six of *Eagle's* Swordfish torpedo bombers flew to Sidi Barrani on the 19th, and made a moonlight attack on Tobruk in the early morning of the 20th. *Bande Nere* was not there, but a tanker was torpedoed, and two other merchant ships probably damaged. The fleet returned to Alexandria at dawn on the 20th.

Meanwhile the remainder of the 19th July provided *Sydney* and the three prisoner-laden destroyers with further enemy action. On abandoning the chase *Sydney*, with *Hero* and *Hasty* in company, set course for Alexandria, speed being reduced to 25 knots to allow *Hyperion*, *Ilex* and *Havock* to catch up. These ships had, however, been delayed in rescuing *Colleoni's* survivors, and at three in the afternoon *Sydney* received signals from *Havock* saying that she had been bombed, and that damage to a boiler room had reduced her speed to 24 knots. Collins—who had thought the three destroyers were much closer astern than they were—with an air attack in mind, detached *Hero* and *Hasty* to Alexandria, and himself altered course to support *Havock*. The possibility of submarine attack then caused him to order *Hyperion* and *Ilex*—who it was thought were between *Sydney* and *Havock*—to join him at sunset. *Sydney* experienced heavy bombing attacks shortly after turning back, a stick of bombs straddling her but without damage. At 4.35 she met *Havock*, and two

hours later they were joined by *Hyperion* and *Ilex*, just before the final and fruitless bombing attack of the day. With the damaged *Havock* in the centre, *Hyperion* and *Ilex* forming an anti-submarine screen ahead, and *Sydney* bringing up the rear, the force continued through the night at 20 knots without further incident, and reached Alexandria at 11 a.m. on the 20th.

Sydney had a triumphal entry into harbour. Previous to her arrival Cunningham made a general signal to the fleet saying that she would be in shortly and adding: "Give her a rousing cheer." And the fleet did so. Her own destroyers started it off by hauling out of line in the channel near the boom and cheering her as she passed them. Her berth lay at the far end of the harbour, a distance of about two miles from the boom. Every ship in harbour had cleared lower deck, and as she passed down harbour they cheered her in turn. To one of *Sydney's* company it was "a continuous roar for about fifteen minutes . . . something I will never forget". The Australian destroyers—each flying seven Australian flags for the occasion—gave her a tremendous welcome, and Waller, leading the cheering in *Stuart*, gave an Australian flavour to his greeting with the signal, "Whacko, *Sydney*". It was a great Australian day in Alexandria.

Coming so soon after the fleet action at Calabria, this second reverse had noticeable repercussions on Italian strategy. In a letter to the Admiralty two months later, the Commander-in-Chief said it was "significant that, so far as is known, no Italian surface forces have returned into or near the Aegean since this action was fought".

The credit (he wrote) for this successful and gallant action belongs mainly to Captain J. A. Collins who by his quick appreciation of the situation, offensive spirit and resolute handling of HMAS *Sydney*, achieved a victory over a superior force which has had important strategical effects. . . . *Sydney's* gunnery narrative is of great interest both technically and from the more general point of view. It shows the results obtainable by an efficient control team backed by good material, and it should be given the weight due to the experience of a ship which has had the unique opportunity of firing 2,200 main armament rounds in action in six weeks.

It was the presence of offensive spirit, resolution, and experience on the British side, and their absence from the Italian, which determined the course and result of this action. And once again the lack of operational coordination between the Italian navy and air force was evidenced in Casardi's misplaced confidence that aerial reconnaissance had been carried out over the areas he was to cross. At the same time, neither the shortcomings of the air force nor the state of the weather would appear to excuse his own failure to have ensured such reconnaissance with his own aircraft.

Propaganda—always a double-edged weapon—from Italian and German sources, gave colourful versions of the encounter in broadcasts and newspaper stories in which the odds were represented as heavily against the Italians, and in which, while the loss of one of their cruisers was admitted by the Italians, that of a British cruiser was claimed. But in his *Diary* entry of the 22nd July—three days after the action—Ciano recorded of Mussolini:

Today he was depressed on account of the loss of the *Colleoni*, not so much because of the sinking itself as because he feels the Italians did not fight very brilliantly.

In one particular the action pointed a lesson to the British. The delay imposed upon *Hyperion*, *Ilex* and *Havock* by their stopping to rescue *Colleoni's* survivors may have contributed to the escape of *Bande Nere*. It did result in *Sydney* and the three destroyers (which were each overloaded with some hundreds of demoralised prisoners whose presence gravely lowered the ships' fighting efficiency) being heavily bombed, and *Havock* badly damaged. It was an experience which brought home the unpalatable fact that, faced as they were by greater numbers, British commanding officers could not afford to permit the escape of an enemy vessel or endanger the safety of their own by acts of mercy, but must harden their hearts in similar circumstances in the future. An order to this effect was issued to the fleet.

XI

In the clashes between British and Italian surface forces in the first two months of the war, the initiative established by Cunningham at the outset was retained. But Italian aircraft dominated the air in both the Central and Eastern Mediterranean. The inability to use Malta as a base, even for light surface forces, because of the constant air attacks and weakness of the island's anti-aircraft defences, gave the Italians a considerable degree of freedom to run convoys between Italy and Libya. The navy had some Swordfish aircraft at Malta, but these were of insufficient range to intercept reported convoys, and distance placed a similar ban on surface forces from the Eastern Mediterranean. Italian aircraft carried out daily reconnaissances over Alexandria, so that the enemy was immediately acquainted with British fleet movements, and was able to time the passage of fast convoys to Libya accordingly. In the Eastern Mediterranean, Italian aircraft based on the Dodecanese persistently menaced naval operations, and made the passage of Aegean convoys extremely hazardous. On the 17th July 1940 Air Marshal Longmore,⁶ the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, reported that his slender resources prevented his taking counter action; and Admiral Cunningham told the Admiralty that in its absence, unless he could have suitable escort vessels with good anti-aircraft armament, the hazards to Aegean convoys—and to the cruisers which had to be used to escort them—would be such as to offset their value. Cunningham was also embarrassed, as Nelson had been in the same area nearly 150 years earlier, by his lack of light forces, and his fleet operations were limited by his having to use destroyers to escort slow convoys, "a function which was wasteful of such precious vessels". The major operation entailed in the passage of Aegean convoys during the last days of July, and the scale of air attack encountered, is an instance of the difficulties of this period. The operation, extending over eight days, covered the whole

⁶ Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, GCB, DSO. AOC-in-C RAF in ME 1940-41; IG of RAF 1941. B. St Leonard's, NSW, 8 Oct 1885.

of the Aegean, and the Eastern Mediterranean between Cape Matapan in Greece and the south-western corner of Asia Minor, and employed practically the entire strength of the fleet.

The operation started on the 21st July when *Liverpool*, flagship of the 7th Cruiser Squadron, with *Capetown*, *Diamond*, and *Stuart*, escorting one ship, sailed from Alexandria. The following day they were joined by *Dainty* and *Defender* with five ships from Port Said, and convoy AN.2 was formed, and course set for the Aegean via Elafonisos Channel, between the Greek mainland and Kithera Island.

At midnight on the 23rd July, *Orion*, with *Vampire* and *Vendetta*, left Alexandria for Castellorizo Island, off the south-western point of Asia Minor, and made a demonstration about ten miles off the island shortly before sunset on the 24th July as a diversion from the convoy movement. *Vampire* and *Vendetta* then proceeded to Port Said, where they arrived at 11.30 a.m. on the 25th.

At about that time the ships of the convoy, which had entered the Aegean, were scattered for their Greek ports, with the exception of two bound for the Dardanelles, which continued northwards with the escort group. On the 26th *Capetown*, *Stuart*, and *Defender*, parted company to await the formation of a southbound convoy in the Gulf of Athens. While waiting for this convoy, the cruiser and destroyers sought for a Greek ship, *Ermioni* (440 tons), known to be carrying petrol for the Dodecanese Islands; but they failed to find her.

Vampire and *Vendetta* sailed from Port Said again at 10 a.m. on the 26th, to rendezvous with *Orion* for a further demonstration against Castellorizo. They were accompanied by the armed boarding vessels *Fiona* and *Chakla* to represent transports, and on the evening of the 27th the force proceeded as if to carry out landings on the island.⁷ Neither demonstration provoked any action from the island's defences, although the ships fired star shells on the 27th, nor was there any sign of enemy air activity.

Meanwhile the fleet—three battleships, *Eagle*, *Neptune*, *Sydney*, and ten destroyers—sailed from Alexandria to provide cover for the southbound convoy. *Sydney* had been in Alexandria since her return there from the action off Cape Spada. On the 21st July she had landed a funeral party for Italian seamen from *Colleoni*, and on the 24th Collins and a number of his officers attended the funeral of Captain Navaro, who had died of wounds he suffered in that ship. The following day *Sydney* was painted in camouflage colours, and on the 26th she embarked an aircraft to replace that lost at Bardia. She left Alexandria in company with *Neptune* at 3 a.m. on the 27th, and the two ships joined the Commander-in-Chief at sea seven hours later.

At 6.20 in the evening of the 27th—at which time *Capetown*, *Defender*, and *Stuart* had assembled a convoy of four ships—AS.2—in the Aegean and set course southwards for the Kithera Channel—the fleet was heavily

⁷ HMS *Fiona* (1927), 2,190 tons; sunk by enemy aircraft off Sidi Barrani, 18 Apr 1941.

HMS *Chakla* (1914), 3,081 tons; sunk by enemy aircraft in Tobruk Harbour, 29 Apr 1941.

bombed. In all, five attacks were made by enemy aircraft, and sixty-three bombs were dropped. In one of these attacks, just after seven in the evening when, as a *Sydney* officer recorded:

we were in the midst of our meal in the wardroom, suddenly, without warning, we heard the hair-raising whistle of approaching bombs. Eating ceased at a stroke, ears were cocked, and then as one man we yelled "Bombs!" someone adding: "Yes, and they're going to fall bloody close!"⁸

They did. A salvo of heavy bombs straddled *Sydney*, but fortunately did little harm, there being two minor splinter casualties, and the newly-embarked aircraft was made unserviceable by splinter damage. There was no other damage in the fleet.

The following day the convoy and escort—which *Liverpool*, *Dainty*, and *Diamond* rejoined at daylight—passed through Kithera Channel into the Mediterranean, and *Neptune* and *Sydney*, detached from the fleet, then to the north-west of Crete, entered the Aegean through the Elafonisos Channel, to endeavour to intercept the *Ermioni*. The two ships were heavily bombed from 7.35 to 8 p.m. and were near missed; *Sydney* suffered no damage, but *Neptune's* aircraft, badly riddled by splinters, had to be jettisoned as a fire hazard. Shortly before dusk, near the Thermia Channel at the entrance to the Gulf of Athens, the cruisers intercepted *Ermioni*, and *Sydney* gave anti-submarine protection to *Neptune* while the British cruiser, having made sure that *Ermioni* had been abandoned by her crew, shelled her, setting her on fire. With the lights of Athens faintly glimmering on the horizon, the cruisers stood by as *Ermioni* exploded and disappeared, and at 9.25 they proceeded. At two in the morning of the 29th, they passed through Kithera Channel southbound, and entered Alexandria at noon the following day.

During their Mediterranean passage on the 29th, both the fleet and convoy were subjected to nine heavy bombing attacks between 7.35 a.m. and 3 p.m. In *Stuart* it was estimated that some 200 bombs were aimed at the convoy and its escorts. There was, however, only one hit, when *Liverpool* was struck by a bomb which, penetrating two decks, failed to explode. During the last attack one Italian bomber was shot down in flames by a Gladiator fighter from *Eagle*, after which the fighter pilot, unable to find *Eagle* and running out of petrol, landed his aircraft on the sea just ahead of *Stuart*. The aircraft sank immediately, and *Stuart's* lifeboat was called away and picked up the pilot, a New Zealander, who insisted on his parachute being saved also "because it cost a lot of money".

Fleet, convoy, and escorts reached Alexandria and Port Said without further incident on the 30th July; and summing up the operation the Commander-in-Chief defined as his urgent needs fighter aircraft over the fleet; radar; and action against enemy airfields. He was to get some relief in these directions before long, and a few aircraft for Malta's defences were then in the Mediterranean on their way to the island in the aircraft carrier *Argus*.

⁸ Ross, *Stormy Petrel*, p. 182.

XII

In August 1940 the Italians began to move on land towards British Somaliland at the southern end of the Red Sea. With the closing of the Mediterranean to through traffic, the approaches to the Red Sea through the Gulf of Aden, the fifteen-mile-wide passage of the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb—the “Gate of Tears”—and the 1,200-mile stretch from the Strait to Suez, became the main highway to the Middle East for convoys from Great Britain as well as those from Australia and India, and its security of first importance. An area of great heat and high humidity; bordered by barren coasts of desert and lofty hog-back mountain ranges; and beset with navigational hazards of off-lying reefs and false horizons; it offered little but discomfort and hard work to those in the ships protecting it. South of Suez the two main British ports were at Port Sudan on the western coast of the Red Sea little more than half-way down, and at Aden, outside and some 100 miles east of the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb. Three hundred and fifty miles north of the Strait, roughly half-way to Port Sudan and also on the west coast of the Red Sea, lay the Italian naval base of Massawa, well situated for the delivery of attacks on the convoys which had to pass it.

The Italians had strong land forces in East Africa; at least 200,000 troops, and 200 aircraft. The naval base of Massawa was securely protected behind an extensive screen of off-lying islands and reefs, heavily fortified, and with its entrances mined. Here were based, at the outbreak of war, seven modern destroyers and eight submarines, with smaller craft, under the command of Rear-Admiral Bonetti. From the Sudan frontier one-third of the way up the Red Sea, to the border of Kenya, the East African coastline was in Italian hands with the exception of 400 miles of French and British Somaliland on the southern border of the Gulf of Aden.

Before 1935 the Red Sea, in Admiralty dispositions, had formed part of the Mediterranean Station; but at the Abyssinian crisis it had been made an operational area of the East Indies Station, and had so remained. At this juncture this was a matter of concern to the British army and air commanders in North and East Africa, who had to deal with two naval Commanders-in-Chief—Mediterranean and East Indies—regarding the Red Sea; but the position was not altered until October 1941 when the Red Sea again came under the Mediterranean command.

At the end of July 1940 there were about 430 British and Allied merchant ships on the East Indies Station, many of them congregating towards the Red Sea approaches to the Middle East. The protection of all this traffic on the wide ocean stretches and the focal points, coupled with the task of watching the Italian Somaliland coast, made heavy demands on the forces available, and there was some reinforcement from other areas at this period. Just before the outbreak of war the cruiser *Leander*, which had arrived at Alexandria on the 26th May after detaching from the escort of convoy US.3 ten days earlier, was allocated to the Red Sea Force, replacing *Liverpool*, which joined the 7th Cruiser Squadron in the Mediterranean. Four of Cunningham's precious destroyers—

Khartoum, *Kimberley*, *Kingston* and *Kandahar*—were also sent south of Suez from the Mediterranean. Early in July the Commander-in-Chief, China, proposed to the Admiralty the release of the Australian-manned merchant cruisers under his command for service elsewhere. This proposal was adopted, and *Kanimbla* was transferred to the East Indies Station, and arrived at Colombo on the 9th August, to spend twelve months on patrol work in the Indian Ocean, and on convoy escort between Durban, Aden, India, and the Persian Gulf. The other two armed merchant cruisers *Moreton Bay* and *Arawa*, were allocated to the South Atlantic Station. On the 24th July, Cunningham offered to surrender to the East Indies Station the cruisers *Capetown* and *Caledon*, which were unsuited for the heavy scale of Mediterranean air attack because of their inadequate anti-aircraft armament and lack of speed, and they left Alexandria for the Indian Ocean on the 3rd and 10th August respectively. And on the 30th July, H.M.A.S. *Parramatta* arrived in Aden from Colombo.

During the passage from Colombo, *Parramatta* was in company with H.M. submarine *Regent*,⁹ with whom she formed a tactical unit to cope with a surface raider suspected to be operating in the Indian Ocean. Such a ship—the *Atlantis*¹ which had sailed from Germany on the 11th March and entered the Indian Ocean in May after laying mines off Cape Agulhas—was in fact operating on the station. On the 10th June she captured the Norwegian ship *Tirranna* (7,230 tons), bound from Melbourne to Mombasa, and on the 11th and 13th July respectively sank the British ships *City of Bagdad* (7,506 tons) and *Kemmendine* (7,769 tons). But she was operating some hundreds of miles southward of the *Parramatta* and *Regent*, who made their voyage without incident.

By the beginning of August 1940 the Red Sea Force, which was under the command of the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, based ashore at Colombo, and administered by the Senior Naval Officer, Red Sea (Rear-Admiral Murray), based ashore in Aden, had been considerably expanded from its establishment with *Liverpool* and *Hobart* in April. By August, or shortly afterwards, it consisted of the cruisers *Hobart*, *Leander*, *Caledon* and *Carlisle*; the destroyers *Kimberley*, *Kingston*, and *Kandahar*;² the sloops H.M. Ships *Flamingo*, *Auckland*, *Shoreham* and *Grimsby*; H.M. Indian Ships *Clive*, *Indus* and *Hindustan*; and H.M.A.S. *Parramatta*.³

⁹ HMS *Regent*, submarine (1930), 1,475 tons, one 4-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17.5 kts; sunk in Strait of Otranto, 16 Apr 1943.

¹ *Atlantis*, German auxiliary cruiser (1937), 7,862 tons, six 5.9-in guns, four torp tubes, 93 mines, 18 kts; sunk by HMS *Devonshire* NW of Ascension I, 22 Nov 1941.

² *Khartoum* was lost to this force when she sank in Perim harbour on 23 June as the result of internal explosion. (HMS *Khartoum*, destroyer (1939), 1,760 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts.)

³ HMS *Carlisle*, anti-aircraft cruiser (1918), 4,200 tons, eight 4-in AA guns, 29 kts.

HMS *Kimberley*, destroyer (1939), 1,760 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts.
HMS *Kingston*, destroyer (1939), 1,760 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk by aircraft at Malta, 11 Apr 1942.

HMS *Kandahar*, destroyer (1939), 1,760 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; mined off Libyan coast 19 Dec and sunk by own forces 20 Dec 1941.

HMS *Flamingo*, sloop (1939), 1,250 tons, six 4-in guns, 19.25 kts.

HMS *Auckland*, sloop (1938), 1,250 tons, six 4-in guns, 19.25 kts; sunk off Tobruk, 24 Jun 1941.

HMS *Grimsby*, sloop (1934), 990 tons, four 4-in guns, 16.5 kts; sunk off Tobruk, 25 May 1941.

HMS *Clive*, sloop (1920), 1,748 tons, two 4-in guns, 14.5 kts.

HMS *Indus*, sloop (1935), 1,190 tons, two 4-in guns, 16.5 kts; sunk by Jap aircraft at Akyab, 6 Apr 1942.

HMS *Hindustan*, sloop (1930), 1,190 tons, two 4-in guns, 16.5 kts.

Local forces based on Aden were two minesweepers, two small A.M.C.'s and two armed trawlers. Various ships joined the force from time to time—including *Ceres* and *Colombo*, which had been intended for the Australia Station—and for a while the 8-inch gun cruisers *Dorsetshire* and *Shropshire* were on escort duty in the Red Sea.

Up to August 1940 enemy naval opposition in the Red Sea and its southern approaches was very slight, and confined to submarine activity in which the Italians came off second best. Four of their eight submarines were accounted for by the end of June. Nothing was seen of their surface forces. Within an hour or two of the outbreak of war the Italian Air Force raided Aden, and attacks continued on that base, and were also carried out on convoys, but with little harmful result.

The first air raid alarm at Aden was at 1.57 a.m. on the 11th June, as *Hobart* left the harbour on a sweep into the Red Sea. In harbour again next day she experienced further raids; in one by four aircraft on the 13th one raider fell a victim to either her fire or that of *Carlisle*. On the 19th *Hobart* carried out an air raid on her own account, when shortly before dawn she flew off her amphibian "pusser's duck" which bombed an Italian wireless station on Centre Peak Island—in the middle of the Red Sea opposite Massawa—and did some damage to the station buildings. Throughout the rest of June *Hobart* patrolled and carried out sweeps in the southern Red Sea, and on the 30th in Aden embarked 687 officers and men of a Punjabi battalion for British Somaliland.

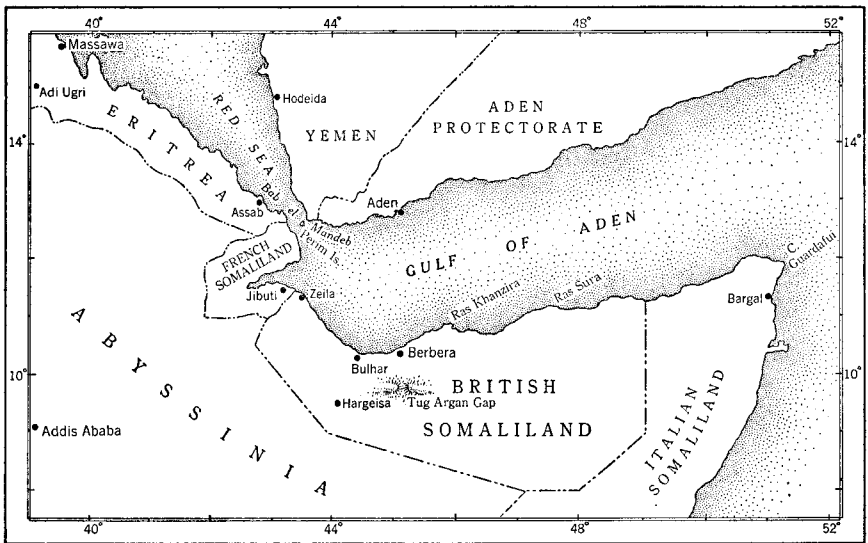
Before the formation of the Red Sea Force in April, it had been decided in principle that British Somaliland should be held. At that time the military forces there consisted of the 650 Somali troops of the Somaliland Camel Corps. Reinforcement began in May, when *Hobart* went to Berbera to superintend the disembarkation from the troopship *Karanja* (9,891 tons) of a battalion of the 2nd King's African Rifles. There were no further reinforcements until the end of June, and the general situation was altered by the collapse of France in that month. British military plans had been based on close collaboration with strong forces in French Somaliland; but the collapse of the French colony followed that of France. Early in July, however, Colonel Chater,⁴ commander of the troops in Somaliland, thought that the British position would not be untenable under certain conditions, one being that naval support was forthcoming on the coast west of Berbera; and this was promised to the fullest possible extent.

From the French Somaliland border in the north-west, the British coastline extended eastwards some 400 miles to the frontier of Italian Somaliland. Just inside the western boundary was the small port of Zeila. Some hundred miles farther east, and almost opposite Aden 150 miles distant from it across the Gulf, lay Berbera, the seat of government, and a practically undeveloped port whose normal trade was catered for by dhows and a small weekly steamer. With only two small piers devoid of lifting

⁴ Maj-Gen A. R. Chater, CB, DSO, OBE. Comd defence of British Somaliland 1940; comd troops Cyprus 1940-41; Military Governor and comd troops British Somaliland 1941-43; Director of Combined Ops India and SE Asia 1944-45. Regular soldier; of Camberley, Surrey, Eng; b. London, 7 Feb 1896.

gear and capable only of accommodating lighters or ships' boats at between half and full tide, the port was ill adapted for the rapid handling of troops and equipment. The position was aggravated in the summer months by the *kharif*, a strong south-west wind often reaching gale force, which blows for approximately twelve hours every night from June to September, making boatwork hazardous if not impossible in the harbour. In these conditions, *Hobart* was called upon for considerable resource and planning in the weeks of reinforcement and withdrawal during July and August 1940.

With her Punjabi troops on board, and escorting *Chantala*⁵ carrying the battalion's transport and heavy stores, *Hobart* sailed from Aden at 3 p.m. on the 30th June, and reached Berbera early next morning. For



the following two weeks she escorted troopships between Aden and Berbera, and assisted with her boats in their disembarkation there. On the 31st July she again left Aden for Berbera escorting a ship whose troops were landed in her boats.

On the 3rd August General Legentilhomme, who had attempted to fight on in French Somaliland, left there, and on the 4th arrived at Berbera on his way to Aden. That day the Italians invaded British Somaliland, the main attack being from Abyssinia across the mountains towards the coastal plains and Berbera. The British defence line was at Tug Argan Gap, forty miles or so inland from the port. Another Italian column invaded from French Somaliland, and captured Zeila on the 5th August. Hargeisa, on the line of advance of the main enemy column, fell on the 6th

⁵ HMS *Chantala*, armed merchant cruiser (1920), 3,129 tons; sunk by mine in Tobruk Harbour, 7 Dec 1941.

August, and by the 11th the Italians were pouring down the escarpment on to the British defence line.

During this period *Hobart* was in Berbera or on the Somaliland coast. Between the 3rd and 5th August she swept to Guardafui, and carried out a reconnaissance of the coast west of Berbera to investigate the best position to hold up an enemy advance by coastal bombardment. Back in Berbera on the 5th, she found there *Parramatta*, who had arrived the previous day and experienced her first bombing attack. *Parramatta* left on convoy duty on the 6th, but *Hobart* remained, her boats busy ferrying native refugees to their embarkation ship, and disembarking the 2nd Black Watch, who had been brought from Aden in *Chantala*.

Early in the morning of the 8th August, three enemy fighter aircraft raided the Berbera airfield, and, thinking they might be from Zeila and could be caught on the ground refuelling, Captain Howden catapulted *Hobart's* amphibian. At 5.30 a.m. the aircraft, approaching Zeila from the sea "in a steady dive from eight thousand feet", dropped its two bombs from 800 feet, aiming at the Residency—believed to be the Italian headquarters—in lack of other targets. The bombs fell close enough to blow in all the windows, after which the amphibian lumbered over the town at 250 feet and machine-gunned the Residency, motor-lorries, and enemy posts and troops. It landed on the harbour at Berbera at 7 a.m. with two bullet holes in the port main lower plane, but no other damage. The Italians hit back about three hours later, when two aircraft dropped eight bombs which fell in the harbour between *Hobart*, *Auckland*, and *Amber*.⁶ They came nearer in an attack at 10.50 a.m., when they straddled *Hobart* and *Chakdina*,⁷ but in neither attack was there any damage. In the evening of the following day, in response to a request from military headquarters, *Hobart* landed a 3-pounder Hotchkiss saluting gun on an improvised mounting made from a 40-gallon drum reinforced by iron plating, with a crew of three and sixty-four rounds of ammunition. By four o'clock in the morning of the 10th, the gun—with its three sailors⁸ in military uniform—was in position at Tug Argan Gap where, said the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, "their presence and conduct were of the utmost value to the morale of the garrison".

From the 11th to the 14th of the month *Hobart* was in Aden, but she arrived back in Berbera at 5.26 p.m. on the 14th to conduct the withdrawal which was ordered by the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, the following day.

It was evident (wrote Admiral Murray in his subsequent report) that with *Hobart's* specialised knowledge of Berbera it was best to leave him to deal with details of evacuation on the spot, after providing him with as many ships and boats etc. as could be. Captain H. L. Howden, OBE, RAN, was Senior Naval Officer, Berbera, throughout the critical time.

⁶ HMS *Amber*, armed trawler (1934), 700 tons, one 4-in gun, 12 kts.

⁷ HMS *Chakdina*, armed merchant cruiser (1914), 3,033 tons; sunk by aircraft in E. Mediterranean, 5 Dec 1941.

⁸ PO H. Jones, AB H. C. Sweeney and AB W. J. Hurren.

Ships which took part in the operation were the cruisers *Hobart*, *Carlisle*, and *Ceres*; the destroyers *Kimberley* and *Kandahar*; the armed merchant cruisers *Chakdina*, *Chantala*, and *Laomédon*;⁹ the sloop *Shoreham*; the transport *Akbar* (4,043 tons), and the hospital ship *Vita* (4,691 tons).

Howden received the withdrawal signal from Admiral Murray at 1.15 p.m. on the 15th August; and at a conference with the Base Commandant and a representative from army headquarters (where Major-General Godwin-Austen¹ had assumed command on 11th August, at which time it was intended strongly to reinforce British Somaliland) it was decided that embarkation should begin at 11 a.m. on the 16th. *Hobart's* shipwrights had made from an old lighter an additional pontoon pier, which thus gave three pier embarkation points, using as ferrying craft two tugs—*Zeila* and *Queen*—and four lighters, all manned by *Hobart*; and the boats of all naval ships in harbour.² Howden appointed Lieutenants Morrison³ and Malleeson⁴ of *Hobart* as his operations staff, and combined operational headquarters were set up in the ship. Beachmasters were appointed, and ship to shore communications established with *Hobart's* signalmen. Throughout the operation, ships' armament had constantly to be manned in anticipation of a possible surface attack by enemy destroyers or torpedo boats, though none eventuated; and in readiness for air attacks, which materialised on a number of occasions, in bomber and fighter raids. Seaward defence was afforded by *Carlisle*, whose radar and anti-aircraft guns were a valuable factor; and by an anti-submarine patrol of destroyers and sloops.

Embarkation into *Chakdina*—delayed by air raids which otherwise did no harm—began shortly after noon on the 16th, and by 6.45 p.m. she had embarked 1,100 of the civilian population, including between two and three hundred Abyssinian women and children, and sailed for Aden. On the 17th *Ceres*, patrolling the coast, engaged an enemy column advancing along the Zeila-Berbera road forty miles west of Berbera, and held up its advance. On this day intensive embarkation of troops at Berbera into *Chantala*, *Laomédon*, and *Akbar*, began at 8.30 p.m., and continued throughout the blowing of the *khariif* which caused sea conditions making heavy demands on the courage and skill of the coxswains and crews of the ferrying craft. "To them," reported Howden, "a great part of the success of the evacuation of British Somaliland belongs." General Godwin-Austen, with his staff, embarked in *Hobart* at 10 p.m., increasing the strain on the ship's communications and signals branches. *Hobart's* surgeons, and members of her company not otherwise employed,

⁹ HMS *Laomédon*, armed merchant cruiser (1912), 6,491 tons.

¹ General Sir Alfred Godwin-Austen, KCSI, CB, OBE, MC. (Served Gallipoli and Mesopotamia 1915-19.) Comd 14 Inf Bde 1938-39; GOC Somaliland 1940-41, XIII Corps 1941-42; Director of Tactical Investigation, War Office, 1942-43. B. 17 Apr 1889.

² Ferrying craft used were *Zeila* and *Queen*; the four lighters; two motor-boats, the pinnace, and two cutters from *Hobart*; four motor-boats from Aden, including Admiral Murray's barge; and boats from *Carlisle*, *Kandahar*, and *Shoreham*.

³ Capt T. K. Morrison, OBE, DSC; RAN. HMAS *Hobart* 1938-43; HMAS *Australia* 1944-45. B. Melbourne, 31 Oct 1911.

⁴ Lt-Cdr C. V. S. Malleeson, RN. HMAS *Hobart* 1938-40; HMAS *Canberra* 1941; HMS *Trumpeter* 1943; HMS *Flycatcher* 1945. B. 23 Jun 1912.

meanwhile did good work in a temporary sick bay which was established in the starboard shelter deck to take care of wounded troops.

At 2.30 a.m. on the 18th August the steady stream of troops arriving at the embarkation points was halted, owing to the destruction of a culvert on the main line of retreat. Howden himself landed, and collected a number of Somali truck drivers, whom he placed under the charge of Signalman Martin⁵ of *Hobart*—a reserve rating who was a truck driver in civil life. Martin did a resourceful job assembling a truck convoy and assisting in the withdrawal of the King's African Rifles. Howden compensated the native drivers by giving them passage in the cruiser to Aden, "except one who wished to remain in Somaliland, to whom I presented a 1940 car that had run only 51 miles". The operations of the truck parties were helped by Lieutenant Synnot⁶ of *Hobart*, who was established as forward observation officer on Government House tower, with a portable wireless set and a team of signalmen and telegraphists, and sent out cars and trucks as necessary to bring in stragglers.

At 6.20 a.m. on the 18th *Hobart's* aircraft was catapulted and reconnoitred all the passes on the Berbera plain, returning an hour later without having sighted the enemy. By early afternoon the main embarkation was completed, and the embarkation ships—including the hospital ship *Vita*, and the *Chakdina* which had returned from Aden for a further load—were sailed for that port. Throughout the afternoon demolition parties from *Hobart* operated ashore, finally firing the wooden piers, and the day closed with *Hobart* being straddled by bombs from three Italian aircraft, suffering only slight splinter damage. The night of the 18th was unusual in that the *kharij* was late. The surface of the harbour, a mirror in a flat calm, reflected the light of a rising full moon and the glare of the demolition fires which, burning on shore, crackled with the explosions of small arms ammunition set off in the flames.

The wind came away with the early morning of the 19th, and by daylight was blowing strongly. At 7.45 a.m. *Hobart* commenced bombarding Berbera, destroying Government House, the police barracks and lines, storehouses and government offices, and firing in all sixty-six rounds of 6-inch shell. Some forty miles west along the coast, *Caledon* and *Kandahar* bombarded Bulhar. During *Hobart's* bombardment some stragglers were seen on the beach. Synnot took a motor-boat as close in to the heavy surf as possible and anchored, then he, with Able Seaman Lewis,⁷ swam ashore and brought off three exhausted men of the King's African Rifles. They were the last to be embarked. At 8.46 *Hobart* weighed and proceeded at 25 knots to Aden, where she arrived at 3 o'clock that afternoon.

The operation was carried out with only one loss among the embarkation craft—that of the tug *Queen*—and there were no damage or casualties in

⁵ Signalman C. Martin, PA1451; RANR. HMAS's *Hobart* 1939-42, *Kalgoorlie* 1942, *Heros* 1943-44. Of Alberton, SA; b. Alberton, 28 May 1918.

⁶ Cdr T. M. Synnot, DSC; RAN. HMAS's *Hobart* 1938-40, *Arunta* 1942; Sqn Gunnery Officer, 15 Cruiser Sqn 1944-45. Of Woollahra, NSW; b. Cooma, NSW, 15 Jan 1916.

⁷ AB V. E. Lewis, PA1490, RANR. HMAS's *Hobart* 1939-42, *Tamworth* 1942-44. Of Semaphore, SA; b. Glanville, SA, 8 Aug 1919.

the ships. In all, 7,140 were embarked, comprising 5,690 combat troops, 1,266 civilians, and 184 sick. *Hobart* lost her Hotchkiss gun, and its crew were at the time believed to have been killed. They were in fact made prisoners by the Italians, and were recovered at Adi Ugri, Eritrea, on the 1st April 1941, when Italian East Africa fell to the British.

The loss of British Somaliland placed the Italians on the flank of the important convoy route through the Gulf of Aden into the Red Sea. But they made little use of the advantage. Their naval forces at Massawa were inadequate; and the British blockade, combined with the retaliatory attacks made by the Royal Air Force on their bases and the hot reception given to their aircraft when they attacked convoys, restricted their activities in the air. Writing in October 1940, Lieut-Commander Walker in *Parramatta* said that a ship carrying a large consignment of air bombs for the Italians had been sunk off Port Sudan, and "the effect of this loss, and the blockade, was eventually so serious that recent Italian bombs have sometimes been converted shells". Mr Churchill deplored the temporary loss of British Somaliland

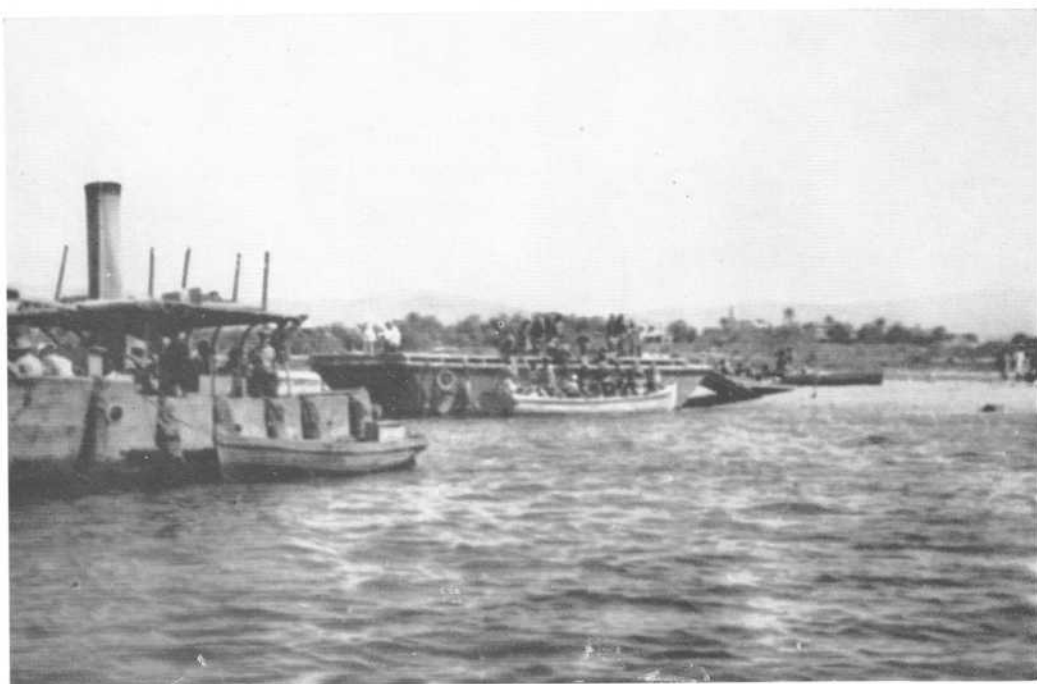
as our only defeat at Italian hands. At this particular moment, when formidable events impended in Egypt and when so much depended on our prestige, the rebuff caused injury far beyond its strategic scale.⁸

It was for its political effect that the withdrawal was chiefly regretted. The loss of Somaliland did not affect British naval operations in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, but rather relieved them of a commitment at a time when relief was welcome.

XIII

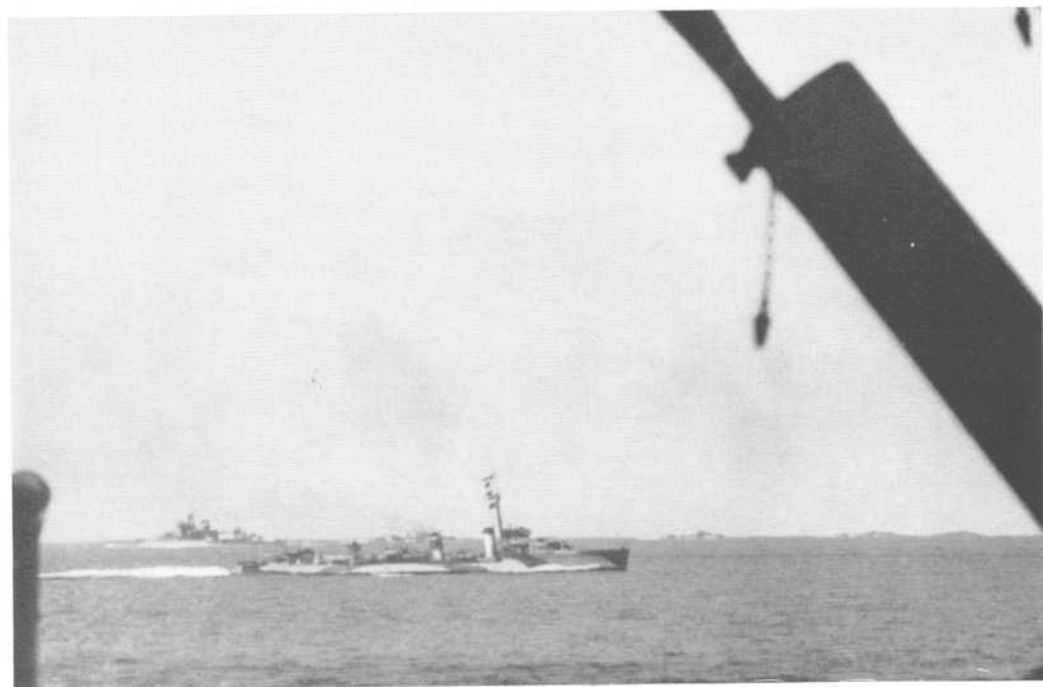
On *Hobart's* busiest day of the main embarkation at Berbera, Australian ships in the Mediterranean were employed on an operation associated with the "formidable events impending in Egypt". The Italians in Libya, freed from any threat from Tunisia with the collapse of France, had brought considerable reinforcements to their eastern frontier. In the forenoon of the 16th August Cunningham in *Warspite*, with *Malaya*, *Ramillies*, and the cruiser *Kent*—which had lately joined the fleet—screened by destroyers including *Stuart*, *Waterhen*, *Vendetta*, and *Diamond* of the 10th Flotilla, sailed from Alexandria to help the army by doing as much damage as possible to the material and morale of Italian military concentrations—troops, guns, and stores collecting at Capuzzo and near Bardia. A bombardment by the four big ships was carried out from 6.58 a.m. to 7.20 a.m. on the 17th August. Later air reconnaissance showed appreciable results, especially at Capuzzo. But in his summing up of the operation Cunningham considered that the Italians had showed such skill in dispersing stores and transport over wide areas, that targets offered did not justify a repetition of such naval bombardments while warfare in the desert remained static. However the bombardment gave useful—and heartening—exercise in cooperation with the Royal Air Force which, in conjunction with some of *Eagle's* fighters operating from shore, pro-

⁸ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol II (1949), p. 383.



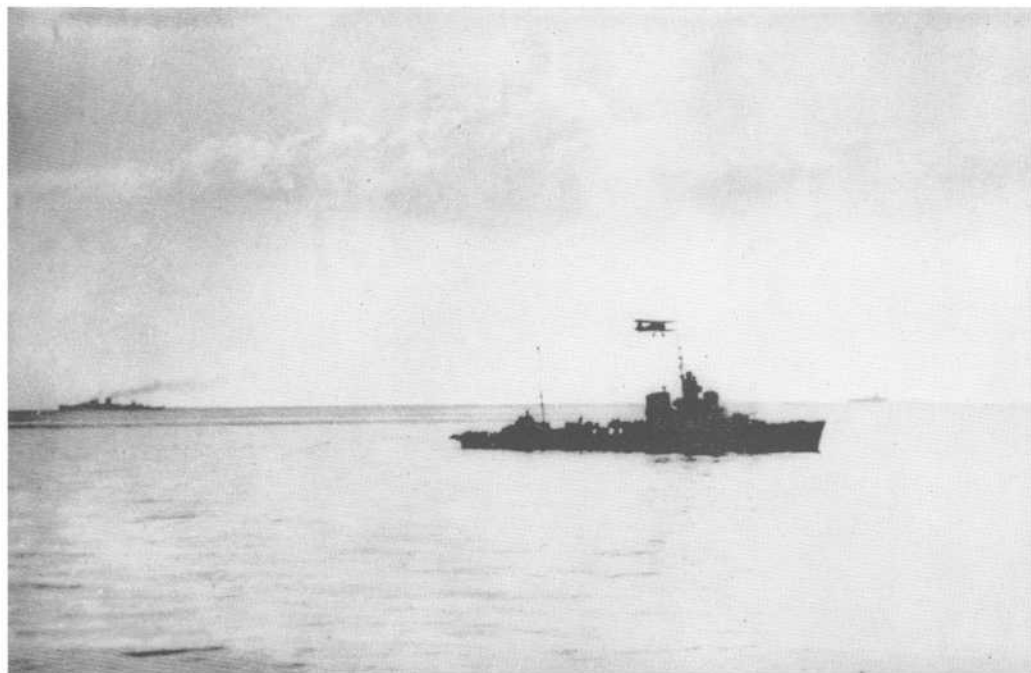
(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Temporary Pier and Tug *Queen* at Berbera, August 1940.



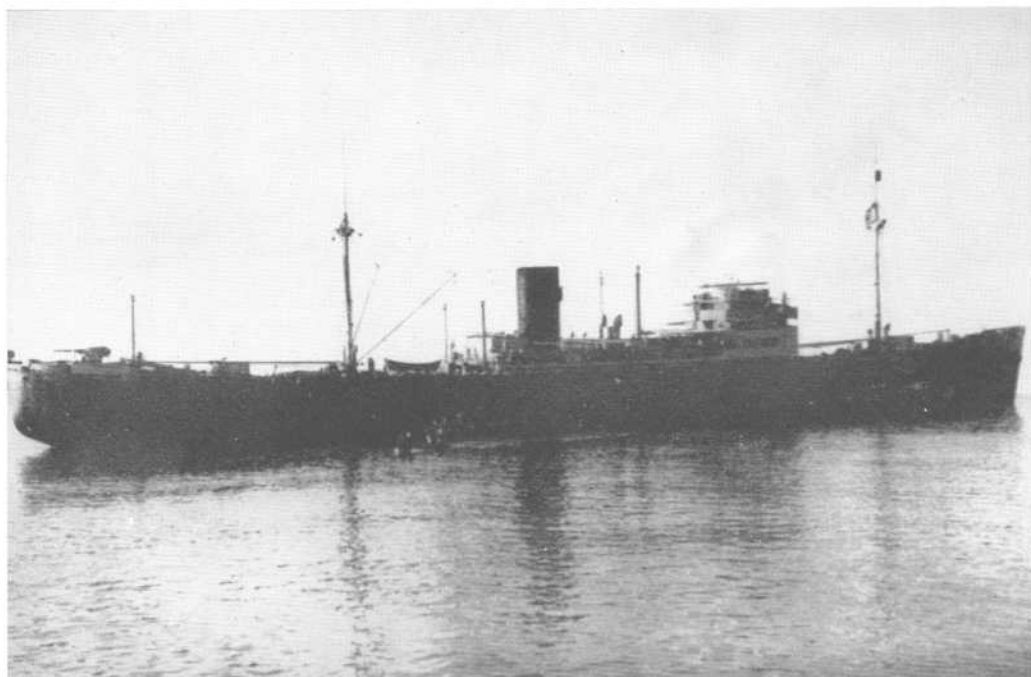
(R.A.N. Historical Section)

H.M.A.S. *Stuart* with Mediterranean Fleet.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Italian Destroyer *Artigliere* stopped and abandoned in Mediterranean Operations.
12th October 1940.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

German Raider *Pinguin*.

vided cover for the fleet. On the return voyage to Alexandria the ships were heavily attacked by Italian bombers. The fleet suffered no damage, but the fighters, without loss to themselves, shot down twelve of the enemy aircraft, a "sight for the fleet which the sailors thoroughly enjoyed".⁹

Some hundred miles west of Bardia, and fifty miles beyond Tobruk, lies the Gulf of Bomba. There the Italians had a seaplane base, and an anchorage at Jez-el-Marakeb. With the object of damaging Italian morale and material, a night bombardment of the area was carried out on the 24th August by destroyers under the command of Captain Waller in *Stuart*. Simultaneously the gunboat *Ladybird* entered Bardia Harbour to do what damage she could. Supporting cover for both operations was provided by *Sydney*. Air fighter cover was arranged for the return journey of the ships to Alexandria, and it was hoped that the night's activities would bring about morning air attacks on the ships in which the fighters would repeat their successes of a week earlier.

Stuart, with *Waterhen* and *Diamond* of the 10th, and *Juno* and *Ilex* of the 2nd Flotillas, sailed from Alexandria at 4.30 a.m. on the 23rd August, followed by *Sydney* six hours later. At 11.30 *Ladybird* left Mersa Matruh for Bardia. The Alexandria ships made a good offing, and at 8 p.m. the destroyers were approximately due north of Bardia and midway between the Libyan coast and Crete. From this point *Waterhen* was detached to give close cover to *Ladybird* at Bardia, and *Stuart* and the remaining destroyers headed at 27 knots for Bomba, off which *Sydney* was to patrol some forty miles to seaward. *Stuart* sighted the land shortly before 1 a.m. on the 24th, exact identification being difficult because of its lowness and considerable inshore mist. But a patch of electric lights presumably indicated the seaplane base, and their position—for they were suddenly switched off, suggesting that the force had been sighted from the shore—was bombarded by the four destroyers, after which a short shoot was carried out at the anchorage at Jez-el-Marakeb. Most of the destroyers' shells were seen to burst ashore, and Waller later reported that he could confirm "that the area round the lights had an unpleasant three minutes". The Italians made no reply to the fire, and at 1.39 a.m. the force retired to rendezvous with *Sydney* and *Waterhen* at 8 a.m. close inshore between Salum and Mersa Matruh to bait enemy bombers. Time to keep this appointment was limited, Waller noted,

by the excessive fuel consumption in my 21-year-old leader—I could not make the passage back to the rendezvous at more than 25 knots or I should have been dangerously low in fuel by the forenoon.

Meanwhile *Waterhen* had arrived off Bardia around midnight on the 23rd, and sighted *Ladybird* stealing towards the harbour in the shadow of the land. Shortly after 12.3, as the gunboat was shaping up for the entrance, the shore batteries to the north and south of Bardia opened fire on her, but she was not hit, and at five past one entered the harbour to find it empty of shipping. Once inside and screened from the fire of the

⁹ Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey* (1951), p. 271.

shore batteries by the high cliffs, she spent twenty-five minutes bombarding buildings ashore at point blank range—making a tremendous noise in the confined space enclosed by high land—and at 1.30 a.m. on the 24th cleared the harbour again, to the great relief of those in *Waterhen*. The destroyer closed the land and gave supporting fire as *Ladybird*, under cover of a smoke screen, again successfully ran the gauntlet of the shore batteries' fire and, though straddled, withdrew without damage or casualties.

A main object of the operation, the baiting of Italian bombers in the forenoon of the 24th, was not achieved. *Stuart* had made precautions against bomb splinters in the time honoured manner by shielding her bridge and upperworks with hammocks. But they were not needed. The hoped for air attack on the return journey did not develop, and the combined force reached Alexandria in the evening of the 24th without further incident.

XIV

Early in September the Mediterranean Fleet was reinforced by the battleship *Valiant*, the aircraft carrier *Illustrious*, and the anti-aircraft cruisers *Calcutta* and *Coventry*.¹ *Valiant* replaced *Royal Sovereign*, whose boilers said the Commander-in-Chief, "had died on us". *Royal Sovereign* left the Mediterranean in August, and was met, escorted by *Dainty*, *Decoy* and *Defender* in the Red Sea on her way south, by *Parramatta* on the 15th of the month. *Parramatta* joined the escort "but", reported Walker, the bad state of the battleship's boilers notwithstanding, "we could not keep up". The reinforcements successfully arrived from the Western Mediterranean in what was the first attempt to pass large scale forces between Cape Bon and Sicily since Italy entered the war. It was a comprehensive operation which engaged the Mediterranean Fleet and Force "H", from Gibraltar; and included the passing of convoys between Alexandria and Malta and from the Aegean to Port Said; and air attacks on and bombardments of enemy objectives in the Dodecanese Islands. *Sydney*, and all the destroyers of the 10th Flotilla except *Waterhen* in Alexandria with condenser trouble, took part.

The operation started on the 29th August with the sailing from Alexandria of the Malta convoy—*Cornwall* (10,605 tons), *Plumleaf* (5,916 tons) and *Volo* (1,587 tons)—escorted by *Jervis*,² *Juno*, *Dainty*, and *Diamond*. Before daylight the following morning the Commander-in-Chief left Alexandria in *Warspite*, with *Eagle* and *Malaya*; the 7th Cruiser Squadron, *Orion* and *Sydney*; the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, *Kent*, *Gloucester*, and *Liverpool*; and twelve destroyers. That same forenoon the reinforcements, supported as far as Sardinia by *Renown*, *Ark Royal*, *Sheffield*³ and destroyers of Force "H", passed Gibraltar east bound. On the way to the Central Mediterranean, aircraft from *Ark Royal* attacked Elmas airfield at Cagliari,

¹ HMS *Calcutta*, anti-aircraft cruiser (1919), 4,200 tons, eight 4-in guns, 29 kts; sunk off Crete, 1 Jun 1941.

HMS *Coventry*, anti-aircraft cruiser (1918), 4,290 tons, ten 4-in guns, 29 kts; sunk in E Mediterranean, 14 Sep 1942.

² HMS *Jervis*, destroyer (1939), 1,695 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

³ HMS *Sheffield*, cruiser (1937), 9,100 tons, twelve 6-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts.

Sardinia, as a diversionary operation. At 10 p.m. on the 1st September the reinforcements, with destroyer escort, parted company with Force "H" to rendezvous with the Mediterranean Fleet south of Malta. Force "H" returned to Gibraltar, and made another air attack on Cagliari on the way.

Meanwhile, also as a diversion, Cunningham detached the 3rd Cruiser Squadron on the 30th August to proceed north of Crete west about as though making a raid into the Aegean, while the battle fleet proceeded close to the south coast of Crete, giving cover to the convoy farther to the southward. The 3rd Cruiser Squadron rejoined the battle fleet at noon on the 31st to the west of Greece. By this time the two forces, and the convoy, were being shadowed by enemy aircraft, and shortly after noon the convoy was bombed. *Cornwall* was hit and set on fire with her steering damaged. She got the fire under control, however, and, steering with the main engines, managed to maintain nine-and-a-half knots. The 3rd Cruiser Squadron was detached to give anti-aircraft protection to the convoy.

At 6 p.m. on the 31st one of *Eagle's* aircraft reported the Italian battle fleet, of two battleships, seven cruisers, and destroyers, 120 miles from *Warspite*. "The immediate and natural reaction," wrote Cunningham, "was to turn towards the enemy to seek action." But night was approaching; and the necessity to protect the convoy decided him to cover it during the night, hoping for the opportunity to engage the following day. Daylight, however, brought no sign of the enemy, either on the sea or in the air; and in the afternoon of the 1st September the Italians were reported by a flying-boat of No. 228 Squadron, R.A.F., from Malta as being about 100 miles from Taranto and making for home. In the morning of 1st September the convoy was split, *Volo* and *Plumleaf* proceeding at maximum speed escorted by *Dainty* and *Diamond*, while *Jervis* and *Juno* remained with the slower *Cornwall*. All ships of convoy and escort reached Malta safely, under the cover of the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, on the morning of the 2nd September.

By this time the reinforcements had negotiated the Sicilian Narrows, and at 9 a.m. on the 2nd September met the Mediterranean Fleet to the south-west of Malta. Here the fleet cruised throughout the day. *Valiant*, *Coventry* and *Calcutta* were sent in to Malta to discharge stores they had brought, and destroyers were sent in to fuel as requisite. It was at this time that German dive bombers were first met with in the Mediterranean. At 3 p.m. on the 2nd, as the destroyers *Janus* and *Imperial* were entering Malta, they were unsuccessfully attacked by three JU-87B aircraft; and later in the day a surprise attack by a small formation of dive bombers was made on *Eagle*. No damage was suffered by the ships, and five enemy aircraft were shot down and four damaged. Bombing was inaccurate, and many bombs were jettisoned a long way from the fleet when the enemy were pursued by fighters.

The passage of the Aegean convoy, and the attacks on the Dodecanese, had been planned for the return journey to Alexandria, and entailed a division of forces as on the westward voyage. At 4.45 p.m. on the 2nd September Rear-Admiral Pridham-Wippell, commanding the 1st Battle

Squadron, with *Malaya*, *Eagle*, *Coventry*, the 3rd Cruiser Squadron and eight destroyers (Force "E")—including *Vampire* and *Vendetta*—was detached and steered to the eastward to the south of Crete. Three hours later Cunningham with *Warspite*, *Valiant*, *Illustrious*, *Calcutta*, the 7th Cruiser Squadron and nine destroyers (Force "I") followed to the eastward—but to the north of Crete. At dawn on the 3rd the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, with *Nubian* and *Mohawk*, was detached from Force "E" to enter the Aegean and pick up the convoy—of five ships—in the Gulf of Navplion. Force "I" entered the Aegean through the Kithera Channel at 9.30 p.m., and an hour later the 7th Cruiser Squadron, with *Ilex* and *Decoy*, left the force to carry out their Dodecanese bombardments, while *Stuart*, who had dropped astern with a burst steam pipe, was ordered to join the 3rd Cruiser Squadron with the convoy. During the night of the 3rd-4th, the attack forces took up their positions for the dawn air raids on the Dodecanese.

The 7th Cruiser Squadron's objective was Scarpanto, where *Orion* was to bombard shore installations at Pegadia, and *Sydney's* target for bombardment was Makri Yalo airfield, at the southern end of the island. With *Ilex* in company five cables astern, *Sydney* approached her firing position at dawn; and as day was breaking the amphibian aircraft was launched "with a shattering roar" to spot. In the growing light the barren-looking coast lifted in jagged peaks, the hills sloping down to a flat stretch where the aerodrome lay. Collins had planned his approach to have *Sydney* heading to seaward, away from the corner between Scarpanto and the adjacent Kaso Island, when on his firing course. Just before the wheel was put over an Italian motor torpedo boat—"E-boat"—was sighted; and it crossed *Sydney's* bows at high speed a little over a mile away as the ship swung to her helm. Two more came out from the land after it. The Italian vessels were immediately engaged by *Ilex*. Two were destroyed, one of them disintegrating in flames after a direct hit. The third escaped, damaged, to the south of Kaso Island. Meanwhile *Sydney*, at 6.19 a.m., opened fire on the aerodrome. Her bombardment lasted twenty-five minutes, during which, her aircraft observer reported, the eastern end of the aerodrome was "well plastered" with the one hundred and thirty-five 6-inch shells she fired. The observer also reported two other E-boats which, not seen from the ships, came from the west side of Scarpanto and escaped to the north of Kaso. The bombardment completed, *Sydney* and *Ilex* withdrew to the southward and rejoined *Orion* and *Decoy*, whose results had been disappointing through lack of targets.

While the 7th Cruiser Squadron had been thus engaged, aircraft from *Illustrious* and *Eagle* bombed respectively the main Italian airfields at Kalatho and Maritza, on Rhodes. Force "I", after *Illustrious* had flown her striking force off to the north of Crete, passed through Kaso Strait and joined up with Force "E", and the returning air striking forces were landed on the carriers south of Crete between 7.30 and 7.40 a.m., having caused considerable damage at their respective targets. The 7th Cruiser Squadron joined the main force three hours later. During the forenoon

of the 4th September, three fruitless bombing attacks were made on the fleet, which reached Alexandria in the early morning of the 5th. The convoy, escorted by the 3rd Cruiser Squadron and destroyers, arrived safely the following day.

The most welcome arrival among the reinforcements was that of *Illustrious* with her armoured decks, Fulmar fighter aircraft, and radio-direction-finding equipment. When the new arrivals joined the fleet off Malta, and the Fulmars shot down Italian shadowing aircraft, it was, as Cunningham later wrote:

to the loud cheers of the ships' companies, who had just about as much as they could stand of being bombed without retaliation. The tremendous effect of this incident upon everyone in the fleet, and upon the Commander-in-Chief as much as anyone, was indescribable. From that moment, whenever an armoured carrier was in company, we had command of the air over the fleet. By that I do not mean that bombing attacks ceased. Far from it. But we felt that we now had a weapon which enabled us to give back as good as we were getting, and also gave us vastly increased freedom of movement.

XV

While these operations were taking place in the Mediterranean, a British naval force—including the cruiser *Australia*—was on its way from the United Kingdom to West Africa. It was part of an expedition including British and Free French military and air detachments, and was accompanied by General de Gaulle, the leader of the Free French Movement which was carrying on the fight alongside Britain against the common enemy. The object was to occupy Dakar and raise the Free French flag in West Africa, thus consolidating the French colonies there and in Equatorial Africa for de Gaulle as a prelude to rallying those in North Africa.

Both in Britain and in Germany the future of French Africa was a matter of considerable concern. The French colonies embraced the greater proportion of the important western bulge of the continent, and extended from the westernmost seaboard to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and from Bizerta in the Mediterranean to the border of the Belgian Congo, roughly some 3,000 miles in both the west-east and north-south directions. This area was cut into to a limited degree by the Spanish strip opposite the Canary Islands, and by Portuguese Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the British colonies of the Gold Coast and Nigeria on the southern edge of the bulge. But on the Atlantic coast, and in the interior, it occupied strategical positions respectively on the north-south ocean routes and the east-west transcontinental equatorial routes, both of which were important to British operations in the Middle East. On the coast were the naval bases of Casablanca in Morocco, and Dakar in Senegal. Dakar, lying behind Cape Verde, the westernmost point of Africa, was little over 500 miles north of Freetown, Sierra Leone, a British naval base and major convoy formation and staging port. It was thus most desirable that Dakar should be in friendly hands, and essential that it should not become an enemy base for submarine and air operations against the sea communications. As to the transcontinental route, Britain was anxious to develop this

for the flying of aircraft reinforcements to the Middle East. These were carried by sea to Takoradi on the Gold Coast, and there disembarked, fitted with long-range tanks, and flown to their destination. The aircraft carrier *Argus* arrived at Takoradi on the 5th September 1940 with stores and equipment for an air base there, and with a number of Hurricanes equipped with long-range tanks for the flight across Africa. The value of Dakar and the French hinterland was thus plain to the British Government, and on the 8th August Mr Churchill, in a minute to the Chiefs of Staff Committee, mentioned that

a telegram from the Governor of Nigeria shows the danger of German influence spreading quickly through the West African colonies of France with the connivance or aid of the Vichy Government. Unless we act with celerity and vigour, we may find effective U-boat bases, supported by German aviation, all down this coast, and it will become barred to us but available for the Germans in the same way as the western coast of Europe.

Six weeks before this minute was written, the possibility of winning over Casablanca had been explored by Britain, but a diplomatic approach had failed in the face of the hostility of the local French, and it was considered that direct action was beyond British strength. General de Gaulle, however, was convinced that the feeling in Dakar was more favourable, and that he would be welcomed and could carry opinion there if he appeared with Free French forces backed by British support. His conviction was shared by other members of a committee which Churchill had formed to advise on French affairs. Churchill, on the 3rd August, gave his general approval to a proposal by this committee for landing Free French forces in West Africa, and plans were worked out in detail. On the 27th August the British War Cabinet gave their final general approval to the project. On that day the French colonies of the Cameroons and Lake Chad Territory, in Equatorial Africa, declared for de Gaulle; a fact that augured well for success at Dakar.

In Germany, the naval staff were equally alive to the importance to the German naval effort of the West African bases, and of the Atlantic islands. At a conference with Hitler on the 20th June 1940, discussing the armistice with France, the Chief of the Naval Staff—Grand Admiral Raeder, a sound strategist—impressed on Hitler the value of Dakar and of other African Atlantic bases. Hitler, who was playing with an idea to use Madagascar for settling Jews under French supervision, was apparently sympathetic, and expressed realisation of the importance of a proposal made by Raeder to exchange Madagascar for the northern part of Portuguese Angola; and said he would consider that suggestion. But this was in the first enthusiasm of easy victory over western Europe and a premature division of the spoils. After the war, the German naval historians, Admirals Assmann and Gladisch, attributed to the undue haste in which the terms of the French armistice were drawn up, the failure to insist upon German occupation of Tunis and Dakar; which failure they considered largely responsible for the position in which the Axis ultimately found itself in the Mediterranean. Within a short time of the signing of the armistice, the

power to insist upon German occupation of these and other French colonial bases had gone. The bargaining power of Vichy France was not negligible, and the trend of events quickly strengthened that power. Raeder, however, continued to press upon Hitler the desirability of securing Dakar and other bases in north-west Africa—the “main danger point”, which, he urged, must be eliminated by cooperation with Vichy France. But he was handicapped by various factors, including the Italian hostility towards, and mistrust of, France; the unpopularity with the German Supreme Command—obsessed with the idea of continental warfare—of the naval viewpoint; and his own personal inability to press the naval views with the necessary persuasiveness and tenacity. Hitler, though he paid Raeder’s opinions lip service while his naval chief was with him, was in his absence easily swayed from them by Goering and his military leaders. Furthermore, he was not always honest with Raeder.

By September 1940 the dangers foreseen by Raeder were very real. It was obvious that Britain would continue to fight, and doubts as to the practicability of an invasion of the island were growing in Germany. On the 18th August, the establishment of a permanent Joint Defence Board by the United States and Canada had been announced. On the 5th September Mr Churchill told the House of Commons that “the naval frontiers of the United States have been advanced along a wide arc into the Atlantic Ocean” by Britain’s leasing for ninety-nine years areas for the establishment of American naval and air bases in Newfoundland, Bermuda, Bahamas, Jamaica, Antigua, St Lucia, Trinidad, and British Guiana; and that the United States Government had transferred fifty destroyers to Britain. On the 23rd August, Ciano recorded in his *Diary* that Mussolini had received an interesting letter from Franco in which the Caudillo talks about Spain coming into the war soon. He says that he has already approached the Germans to get what he needs.

But Franco was playing a wary and carefully-calculated game. Aware of the strength of his position, he displayed a disinclination to show practical appreciation of the assistance he had received from both Italy and Germany during the civil war period. A month after his interesting letter to Mussolini—a month in which the German failure in the Battle of Britain was becoming clear—Franco, on the 22nd September, replied to a German request for naval bases in Morocco with a refusal, and also placed objections in the way of Spanish intervention in the war, including doubts as to the ability to defend the Canary Islands against Britain.

At a meeting with Hitler on the 6th September, Raeder suggested that the delivery of the fifty destroyers represented an openly hostile act by the United States against Germany, and there was a possibility of active participation by America, with perhaps the occupation of Spanish and Portuguese islands in the Atlantic, possibly even the British West African possessions, in an attempt to influence, and if necessary take over, the French West African colonies. Raeder emphasised once more the extreme importance of Dakar for Germany in the war. Hitler agreed, and con-

sidered the occupation of the Canary Islands by the air force as both expedient and feasible. The question of supplies represented the only difficulty, as submarines could not carry petrol. Raeder believed that tankers could reach the Canaries from Spain.⁴

No German action resulted, largely since Franco, for his part, continued to hedge on the question of Spain's intervention in the war, and Germany was thus unable to get farther south than France on the Atlantic seaboard.

In the meantime President Roosevelt, in America, knew of the impending British action against Dakar, and on the 23rd September Mr Churchill told him:

We should be delighted if you would send some American warships to Monrovia and Freetown, and I hope by that time to have Dakar ready for your call.

At the beginning of August 1940 H.M.A.S. *Australia* was in Scapa Flow, attached to the Home Fleet. From the 12th to the 16th of the month, in company with H.M.S. *Norfolk*,⁵ she patrolled north of the Faeroes, where it was believed a German vessel might be trying to get through the patrol screen. From the 23rd to the 28th August, after a few days in Scapa, *Australia* and *Norfolk* proceeded to Bear Island—in the Arctic Sea north of Norway—to capture German trawlers, but found none there. On their way home the two ships closed the north coast of Norway. *Australia's* aircraft was catapulted to carry out a reconnaissance of Tromsø and bomb military installations. But cloud prevented its penetration of the fiord, and it returned to the ship after jettisoning its bomb.

On the 1st September, *Australia* arrived in the Clyde and anchored off Greenock. The day previously the Dakar expeditionary force had sailed for Freetown, Sierra Leone. Vice-Admiral Cunningham⁶ was flying his flag in the cruiser *Devonshire*, and his force included the cruiser *Fiji*, the battleship *Barham*, and four destroyers, all from the Home Fleet.⁷ Free French vessels in the expedition were a trawler and three patrol vessels. The military forces, comprising 4,200 British and 2,700 Free French under Major-General Irwin,⁸ were in accompanying transports. For the actual operation at Dakar the naval force, when it reached Freetown, was reinforced by *Resolution*, *Ark Royal*, and six destroyers from Force "H" at Gibraltar; and by *Cumberland*, *Milford*, *Bridgewater* and the boom defence vessel *Quannet* from the South Atlantic squadron.⁹

On the day *Australia* arrived at Greenock, *Fiji* was torpedoed by a submarine to the west of the Hebrides, and had to return to port; and on 2nd September *Australia* was ordered to replace her in the Dakar force.

⁴ *Ciano Diplomatic Papers* (1949), Note, p. 393, Anthony Martienssen, *Hitler and His Admirals* (1948), p. 84, and Vice-Admiral Assmann's *Headline Diary*.

⁵ HMS *Norfolk*, cruiser (1930), 9,925 tons, eight 8-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 32.25 kts.

⁶ Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Cunningham, GCB, MVO; RN. Comd 1st Cruiser Sqn 1938-41; Chief of Supplies and Transport, Admiralty 1941-43; C-in-C Levant 1943; C-in-C Mediterranean and Allied Naval Cdr, Mediterranean, 1943-46; Chief of Naval Staff 1946-48. B. 1885.

⁷ HMS *Devonshire*, cruiser (1929), 9,850 tons, eight 8-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 32.25 kts. HMS *Fiji*, cruiser (1940), 8,000 tons, twelve 6-in guns, 33 kts; sunk off Crete, 22 May 1941.

⁸ Lt-Gen N. M. S. Irwin, CB, DSO, MC. Comd 6 Inf Bde 1939-40; GOC-in-C West Africa, 1946-48. Regular soldier; b. India, 24 Dec 1892.

⁹ HMS *Bridgewater*, sloop (1929), 1,045 tons, six 4-in guns, 16.5 kts.

HMS *Quannet* (1926), 350 tons, one 3-in gun.

Australia sailed from the Clyde at 8.49 a.m. on 6th September for Sierra Leone, and the voyage was uneventful until the night prior to entering Freetown, 14th September.

The Dakar expedition was dogged by ill luck from the start. As was learned after the war, the Vichy Government, on the 29th August 1940, received information that the Chad Colony had declared allegiance to de Gaulle. Next day the French Armistice Commission asked German permission to send three cruisers from Toulon to West Africa in order to promote respect for Vichy authority. This request was at first refused, but was granted on 1st September in exchange for a guarantee that the ships would resist any British attack. By the night of 10th September information reached London from two sources—the British Consul-General at Tangier, and the British Naval Attaché in Madrid—that a Vichy French squadron would attempt to pass westward through the Straits of Gibraltar. The British thereupon assumed that the Vichy authorities had learned of the projected Dakar operation through leakage of information. The report from Madrid which had been given officially to the Naval Attaché by the French Admiralty, said the squadron consisted of the cruisers *Gloire*, *Montcalm* and *Georges Leygues*, and three destroyers, which had sailed from Toulon and would pass the Straits on the morning of the 11th.¹

It was at this time a normal procedure for the Vichy Government so to advise the British of the movements of French vessels to French possessions not under German control, on the understanding that such movements would not be interfered with by the British. But this was an instance in which it was essential that Vichy French reinforcements should not reach Dakar.

Through a series of untoward events, and although Somerville at Gibraltar had received a copy of the Madrid signal a few minutes after midnight on the 10th and, being aware of the Dakar project, had brought *Renown* to one hour's notice for steam, instructions from the Admiralty to intercept the French force were not received in time for him to stop it in the Straits. The French ships were sighted fifty miles east of Gibraltar by the destroyer *Hotspur*² at 4.45 a.m. on the 11th; and at 8.35 a.m. they passed through the Straits at 25 knots and turned south-west down the African coast. They entered Casablanca, and sailed thence southwards without being detected by British reconnaissance although a search for them was by then in progress, and in the early hours of the 14th September the Admiralty signalled to Vice-Admiral Cunningham—then approaching Freetown with his force—to prevent them from entering Dakar. *Australia*, at this time 140 miles from Freetown and steering for that port, was ordered to rendezvous with *Devonshire*, *Cumberland*, and *Ark Royal*, and during the night of the 14th-15th September a patrol line was established by these ships seventy-five miles north-west of Dakar. The following day, however, aircraft from *Ark Royal* established that the three French cruisers

¹ *Gloire*, *Montcalm* and *Georges Leygues*, French cruisers (1937), 7,600 tons, nine 6-in guns, four 21.7-in torp tubes, 31 kts.

² HMS *Hotspur*, destroyer (1936), 1,340 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

were already in the port. The British ships—with the exception of *Cumberland*, left to patrol south of Dakar—were withdrawn to Freetown, where the Dakar expedition was assembling.

At this stage Mr Churchill was, he later said, of the opinion that the operation should be cancelled:

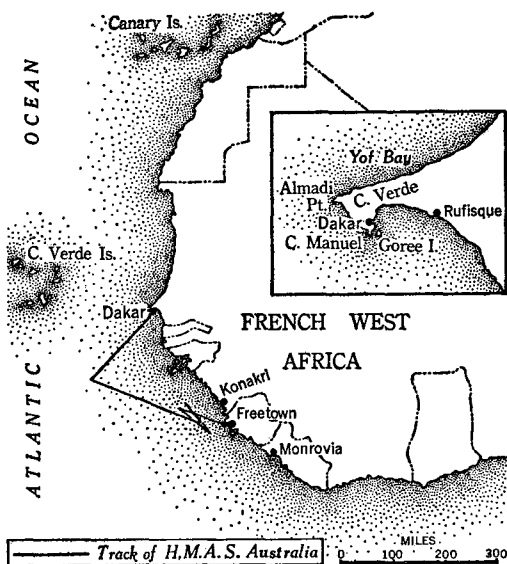
This chapter of accidents sealed the fate of the Franco-British expedition to Dakar. I had no doubt whatever that the enterprise should be abandoned. The whole scheme of a bloodless landing and occupation by General de Gaulle seemed to me ruined by the arrival of the French squadron, probably carrying reinforcements, good gunners, and bitter-minded Vichy officers, to decide the Governor, to pervert the garrison, and man the batteries.³

The British War Cabinet, however, finally decided on the 18th September in view of protests against abandonment received from the commanders on the spot, to give those commanders full authority to go ahead as they thought fit "to give effect to the original purpose of the expedition".

In the evening of the day this decision was reached, *Australia* sailed from Freetown to relieve *Cumberland* on patrol off Dakar, and took over from

that ship at 8.2 a.m. on the 19th September. Half an hour later, when steaming north about 250 miles south of Dakar, she sighted the three French cruisers ahead on the opposite course. *Australia* at once turned and shadowed them from ahead, and signalled *Cumberland* to join her. Through the day the two British ships shadowed the French, steering roughly south-east at 15½ knots. At 5.30 p.m. the French vessels reversed course and increased speed. The British ships followed suit, but with darkness falling the French were lost to sight. Stewart in *Australia*

thereupon altered course direct for Dakar and increased to 31 knots to beat the French arrival there and prevent them from entering, but shortly afterwards sighted a darkened ship approaching from ahead. She turned out to be *Gloire*, which had engine trouble and reported that she was making for Konakri, to the north of Sierra Leone in French Guinea. Stewart, with some misgivings, not knowing the whereabouts of the other two Frenchmen, turned and shadowed her, leaving *Cumberland* to



³ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol II (1949), p. 427.

pick up the others. Not until two hours later did Stewart get definite information from *Cumberland* that the other two were still going north.

Shortly after midnight on the 19th September, *Australia* was ordered by *Devonshire* to escort *Gloire* to Casablanca, and the two ships proceeded northwards at increasing speed as *Gloire's* engine trouble was remedied. Stewart, warned by the Admiralty of the possibility of attack by Vichy submarines, told *Gloire's* captain that if *Australia* were so attacked she would sink his ship. *Gloire*, Churchill later commented, "no doubt spoke to Dakar, and all passed off pleasantly". Throughout the following day and night the two ships proceeded northwards, but at 7 a.m. on the 21st, having received *Gloire's* word that she would proceed to Casablanca unescorted, the Australian cruiser parted company and rejoined the Dakar force. In his report Stewart stated that he "received the impression throughout that *Gloire*, whilst maintaining a logical point of view typical of the French, nevertheless did all in his power to render my task as easy as possible". And on parting he signalled to the French captain: "Bon voyage. Je vous remerci pour votre courtoisie dans une situation difficile," which was excellent in sentiment, whatever else it lacked.

Australia rejoined the Flag—now flying in *Barham*—at 9 a.m. on the 22nd September. At dawn on the 23rd the expeditionary force, in three groups, arrived off Dakar. Groups 1 and 2 were of transports with escorts. Group 3 consisted of *Barham*, *Resolution*, *Ark Royal*, *Australia*, *Cumberland*, *Dragon*, and six destroyers. The day "dawned overcast and misty, with a wind from the north-west". Visibility was down to two or three miles. Churchill listed the atmospheric conditions as another of the misfortunes dogging the expedition:

A long survey of records reveals uniform, regular bright sunlight and clear weather at this season of the year. On September 23, when the Anglo-French armada approached the fortress, with de Gaulle and his French ships well in the van, fog reigned supreme.

The low visibility caused the ships to close the land to be seen—as was desired by de Gaulle—from the shore; and their reception was no brighter than the weather. Free French airmen who flew off from *Ark Royal* were arrested when they landed ashore. De Gaulle's representative—Rear-Admiral d'Argenlieu⁴—who approached the boom in a motor-boat in an endeavour to interview the Governor and Admiral, was fired upon and wounded, and de Gaulle's proposals to the Governor were rejected. Free French sloops with landing parties were similarly opposed. Shortly after 10 a.m. shore batteries opened fire on the British ships. To Cunningham's warning that if shore fire continued the ships would return it, came a reply that if he did not wish his ships to be fired on they should retire more than 20 miles from Dakar.

At about this time *Australia*, which was under fire from shore guns of small calibre, intercepted and drove back to port two Vichy *Le Fantasque*

⁴ Rear-Adm G. T. d'Argenlieu; a Carmelite monk who served in the Morocco campaign 1912-14, in the French submarine service 1914-18, and in the 1939-45 war. Governor-General of French Indo-China 1945-46. B. 8 Aug 1889.

class destroyers which had put to sea. By 11 a.m. the whole fleet, manoeuvring close inshore, was under fire, and by 11.15 the destroyers *Foresight* and *Inglefield*⁶ and the cruiser *Dragon* had been hit and slightly damaged, with some casualties, and *Cumberland* had been hit more seriously. At 11.35 a.m. Cunningham withdrew his ships beyond range.

Australia came into action again during the afternoon, after her ship's company had dined at 12.30 p.m. on bully beef stew. (A rating recorded the gastronomical note at the time: "Rotten!") Just after 4 o'clock she was ordered, with the destroyers *Fury* and *Greyhound*⁶ to attack a Vichy destroyer reported off Goree Island, at the entrance to Dakar. The French destroyer was sighted by *Australia* at 4.26, and the cruiser opened fire with three-gun salvos from her main armament a minute later. The third salvo dismasted the enemy, and the fourth set him on fire forward. Fire was checked after the eighth salvo as the French ship was then on fire fore and aft, and Stewart wished to avoid causing casualties as much as possible. *Australia* was shortly after ordered to rejoin the fleet. The French destroyer, *L'Audacieux*,⁷ was observed to fire only two rounds during the three-minute engagement, but two torpedoes were seen to be fired at about the time of *Australia's* fifth salvo.

A further attempt to put landing parties ashore from the sloops was made shortly after 5 p.m. at Rufisque, to the east of Dakar; but again fire was met from the shore, and the attempt was abandoned. Shortly before midnight on the 23rd an ultimatum was made to the Governor of Dakar saying that failing a satisfactory reply to de Gaulle's proposals by 6 a.m. the following day the ships would open fire. The Governor replied that he would defend Dakar to the end.

Bombardments were accordingly carried out in the morning and afternoon of the 24th September. In the morning *Barham* and *Resolution* bombarded Goree Fort. *Australia* and *Devonshire*, with the destroyers *Inglefield*, *Foresight*, and *Forester* in company, steamed into Goree Bay with the cruisers in Dakar Harbour as their main target. Through the mist *Australia* sighted the coastline at Rufisque ahead, and the smoke of a burning destroyer—presumably her target of the previous day—which came under fire from *Devonshire* before the two cruisers attacked their harbour targets. A second destroyer near that already burning was engaged by the British destroyers.

The French cruisers, apparently under way among merchant ships inside the boom, were barely discernible in the low visibility which, though better than on the previous day, limited *Australia's* point of aim to the enemy's gun flashes for most of the time. The engagement opened shortly after 9.30 a.m., when the battleships replied to fire from the forts, and con-

⁶ HMS *Inglefield*, destroyer (1937), 1,530 tons, four 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torp tubes, 36.5 kts; sunk off Anzio, W Italy, 25 Feb 1944.

⁶ HMS *Fury*, destroyer (1935), 1,350 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; damaged beyond repair off Normandy, 21 Jun 1944.

HMS *Greyhound*, destroyer (1936), 1,335 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; lost off Crete, 22 May 1941.

⁷ *L'Audacieux*, French destroyer (1934), 2,569 tons, five 5.4-in guns, nine 21.7-in torp tubes, 37 kts; sunk at Dakar, 23 Sep 1940.

tinued until 10.24, when the cruisers were ordered to withdraw. During withdrawal they were attacked by three high-level bombers, and a further air attack took place soon after they had rejoined the fleet at 11.30. In each attack bombs fell about fifty yards off *Australia's* quarter. A second bombardment took place in the afternoon, from shortly before one o'clock, and lasted half an hour. It was a fairly hot duel between the two battleships, and shore batteries and *Richelieu*, and *Barham* was hit. The results of the day's attack were disappointing. The one success was with the French submarine *Ajax*⁸ which, depth-charged by the destroyer *Fortune*,⁹ surfaced and surrendered.

Wednesday the 25th September, third and last day of the attempt on Dakar, was the brightest so far as weather was concerned, but the darkest for the British force. Visibility was extreme, with a light northerly wind as the two battleships and two cruisers moved in to attack their respective targets. *Resolution* was taking up position to bombard Gorcee Fort when she was torpedoed by a submarine and seriously damaged. The submarine was sunk with depth charges by *Foresight*. Meanwhile *Barham* engaged *Richelieu*, and *Australia* her earlier target of two cruisers inside the boom.

Australia opened fire at 9.4 a.m. at a range of 26,000 yards; and at her third salvo her amphibian aircraft, which had been catapulted to spot fall of shot, reported a straddle. *Australia* was herself under accurate fire from the French cruisers, though one shortly ceased shooting for a period and then resumed raggedly. Stewart believed *Australia* obtained a hit in this exchange. "Three independent observers reported seeing a pillar of flame and black smoke shoot up. This would probably also account for the cruiser's shooting falling off." The engagement lasted from 9.4 to 9.17 a.m., and about halfway through, as *Australia*, steaming at 25 knots was swinging to her helm when reversing course at the end of a run past the target, she was twice hit aft. The hits, by 6-inch shells, caused no casualties, and only slight structural damage in the officers' galley and an engine room store. At 9.16 a.m. *Devonshire* signalled "Cruisers withdraw". It was during the withdrawal that *Australia* suffered her casualties. From the bridge an aircraft astern was seen to be shot down; but not until later was it learned that it was the cruiser's amphibian Walrus, which was lost together with its crew.¹

All the ships now withdrew on a southerly course. *Resolution*, listing heavily to port, was screened by destroyers, with *Barham* close astern and cruisers on each quarter. At 10.45 the ships were targets for a high-level bombing attack, but suffered no damage. Shortly after noon, the British Government decided that the operation against Dakar must be abandoned, and course was set for Freetown. During the night of the 25th-26th *Resolution*, whose speed was falling, laboured on under her own power, but during the forenoon of the 26th *Barham* took her in tow. Groups 1

⁸ *Ajax*, French submarine (1933), 1,379 tons, one 3.9-in gun, eleven torp tubes, 18 kts.

⁹ HMS *Fortune*, destroyer (1935), 1,350 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

¹ F-Lt G. J. I. Clarke, RAAF, Lt-Cdr F. K. Fogarty, RAN, and PO Telegraphist C. K. Bunnnett, RAN.

and 2 proceeded ahead, Group 3, slowed by the wounded *Resolution*, following at a speed of advance of between six and seven knots. At 8 a.m. on the 28th *Australia* was instructed to return to the United Kingdom with *Ark Royal*, and the two ships were detached for Freetown and reached that port—where Groups 1 and 2 had already arrived—in the early afternoon of the 28th, eighteen hours ahead of the remainder of Group 3. At 6.30 a.m. on the 30th September the two ships screened by *Fortune*, *Forester* and *Greyhound*, left Freetown for the United Kingdom.

So ended the ill-starred Dakar expedition. On the British side *Resolution* was disabled for several months, and the cruiser *Cumberland* and two destroyers were badly damaged. The French lost two submarines sunk and two destroyers burnt out and beached, while *Richelieu* sustained damage from a 15-inch shell hit and two near misses of 250-lb bombs. French reaction, apart from that at Dakar itself, was limited to air raids upon Gibraltar from bases in North Africa on the 24th and 25th September.

According to a Vichy report at the time, French casualties at Dakar were 203 killed and 393 wounded; and a Vichy Government spokesman stated that the Dakar incident was closed as far as the French were concerned. A British official statement explaining the abandoning of the operation said that it was decided to discontinue hostilities when it became plain that only a major military operation could succeed: "This decision was taken because it has never been Britain's policy to enter into serious warlike operations against Frenchmen who felt it their duty to obey the commands of the Vichy Government." It was a statement that placed a delicate interpretation on the action at Oran in July.

There is little doubt that some of the fruits of Oran were tasted at Dakar, where the episode, as Mr Churchill later said, illustrated "in a high degree not only the unforeseeable accidents of war, but the interplay of military and political forces . . .". There was considerable criticism of the conduct of the whole affair in the newspapers of Britain and the United States. In Australia, where the newspapers were preoccupied with the Battle of Britain and the results of the recent Federal elections, comment was restrained and was confined mostly to quoting that in the British press. The Australian Government, however, was concerned at the failure, and Mr Menzies, in a telegram to Churchill of the 27th September, expressed his Government's difficulty in understanding "why attempt was made unless overwhelming chances of success. To make what appears at this distance to be a half-hearted attack is to incur a damaging loss of prestige." He complained also that the Australian Government knew practically nothing of the details of the engagement and nothing at all of the decision to abandon it until after newspaper publication. Churchill, in a long and somewhat caustic reply, outlined the course of events at Dakar and, refusing to accept the reproach of a "half-hearted attack"—an attack made at a time when Britain was denuding herself to reinforce the Middle East "in the face of an accumulation across the Channel and the North Sea of barges and shipping sufficient to carry half a million men to these shores at a single voyage and in a single night"—said that he could make

no promises that regrettable and lamentable incidents would not occur, or that there would be no disappointments and blunders. As to the Australian Government's lack of information, it was the oft repeated story of the British Government, itself lacking information, being unable to control the release of news from the opposing side. The exchange of messages between the Prime Ministers, which began acrimoniously but ended on a happier note, reflected more than anything the anxiety of the Australian Government in the greatly weakened position it found itself in as the result of the elections, and the weakened personal position in the Government of Mr Menzies following the loss of a number of his senior Ministers in an air crash at Canberra on the 13th August.²

The effect of the Dakar experiences on the ship's company of *Australia* was beneficial. While the ship was in Greenock during the first week of September, Captain Stewart had been concerned at the repeated incidence of leave breaking. *Australia* was in Greenock for specific duties in connection with the defence of Britain which he was unable to explain to the crew, members of which resented the curtailed leave, especially as there were in port R.N. ships, not engaged on *Australia's* duties, which were giving longer leave. After Dakar, however, he was able to record his satisfaction at the conduct of his officers and men in action, and to note that "a most noticeable ship spirit has now been born which gives me every confidence for the future of H.M.A.S. *Australia*".

XVI

On the 10th September 1940 the Italians, so far successful in East Africa, launched their northern offensive in the Western Desert. It was a cautious approach down the Halfaya Pass to Salum, just within the Egyptian frontier, and on to Sidi Barrani, where they arrived on the 17th. Here they paused, and began to construct fortified camps. The Italian advance brought their left flank near to the sea, whence they could be bombarded; but the loss of Sidi Barrani deprived the British of an advanced airfield and thus lessened the fighter protection which could be given to bombarding ships. On the other hand, Italian air forces at Sidi Barrani were brought within 200 miles of Alexandria and 60 miles of Mersa Matruh. However, Italian concentrations within reach from the sea were bombarded almost nightly by destroyers and gunboats, and also by heavier units. During one of these bombardments the cruiser *Kent* was torpedoed by an enemy aircraft and, struck near the propellers, had to be towed back to Alexandria. *Vendetta* was one of the escorting destroyers. These bombardments had some effect, for by the 26th September most of the targets had moved inland.

Earlier in September Admiral Cunningham received a signal from Mr Churchill which seemed to imply that the Mediterranean Fleet was rather backward in offensive operations. This caused the Commander-in-Chief to

² The Minister for the Army, Brigadier Street, the Minister for Air, James Fairbairn, the Vice-President of the Executive Council, Sir Henry Gullett, and the CGS, Sir Brudenell White, were among those killed.

point out that fleet operations were drastically curtailed by his shortage of destroyers. On the 15th September he had only ten sound vessels out of twenty-two. Of the nine ships in the 10th Flotilla, only three were effective in the Mediterranean at this period. *Stuart*, in need of an extensive refit, was patching up in Alexandria. *Voyager* spent all of September in dockyard hands at Malta. *Vampire*, in Alexandria and on local escort duties for the first few days of the month, was in dock at Port Tewfik from the 14th to the 23rd. *Defender* was in Alexandria making good essential machinery defects. And *Dainty* and *Diamond* were escorting Red Sea convoys.

Sydney spent most of the month in harbour, and some days of it in dry dock. These were not, however, quiet days for the ships in Alexandria, as Italian air raids were an almost daily occurrence—there were three on the 13th of the month. On the 24th the cruiser sailed to provide cover for *Protector*, which had been ordered to intercept a French merchant ship leaving Beirut. *Sydney* patrolled in an area forty miles west of Cyprus, and returned to Alexandria on the 26th.

During the night of the 28th-29th September, the First Division of the battle fleet—*Warspite*, *Valiant* and *Illustrious*—with the 7th and 3rd Cruiser Squadrons, and 2nd and 14th Destroyer Flotillas, sailed from Alexandria escorting *Liverpool* and *Gloucester*, which were between them carrying nearly 2,000 troops to reinforce Malta. Only one ship of the 10th Flotilla accompanied the fleet—*Stuart*, who was bound for Malta to refit. Since *Stuart* was going to be non-operational for a month or more, Waller had transferred with his staff to *Vampire* on the 26th September, and command of *Stuart* had devolved upon her 1st Lieutenant, Robison.³ But he was discharged to hospital the day before the ship sailed, and the navigator, Lieutenant Teacher,⁴ assumed command.

Enemy aircraft were active, and the fleet was heavily bombed on the first day at sea, two of the attackers being shot down by Fulmars from *Illustrious*, and one by anti-aircraft fire. During the air combats in the forenoon one Fulmar was shot down five miles astern of *Stuart*, who turned and proceeded at high speed and picked up the crew of the crashed aircraft. *Stuart* then made after the fleet, but the spurt of speed was too much for her in her bad state below, and she burst a steam pipe. Cunningham thereupon made a general signal to the fleet: "*Stuart* is dying on us. I am sending him back to Alex."; and the old destroyer turned for the Egyptian base. She had time to fill in to reach port at daylight on the 30th, and Teacher decided to carry out an anti-submarine search on the way. At 10.15 p.m. on the 29th a submerged submarine was detected moving stealthily across the destroyer's course, and five minutes later *Stuart* pounced on the quarry with an initial depth-charge attack. There followed a night-long cat-and-mouse hunt. Vainly the submarine tried to shake *Stuart* off. The destroyer, circling above, held it firmly in her

³ Lt.-Cdr R. C. Robison, DSC; RAN. HMAS *Stuart* 1939-41; comd HMAS *Voyager* until sunk Sep 1943; HMAS *Shropshire* 1943-44. Of Liverpool, NSW; b. Springwood, NSW, 29 May 1909.

⁴ Lt.-Cdr N. J. M. Teacher, DSO; RN. HMAS *Stuart* 1939-42; HMS *Quebec* as CO Personnel and for Combined Ops 1942. B. 6 Feb 1914. Killed in action 28 Feb 1943.

detecting gear, and at intervals tore backwards and forwards at high speed over the position to demoralise the Italians. She attacked again with depth charges at 10.45 p.m. on the 29th, and at 1 a.m., 4 a.m., 5.50 a.m. and 6.25 a.m. on the 30th.

Down below in the submarine—the *Gondar*⁵—the Italians spent a nerve-racking night. As was learned after the war, *Gondar* arrived within six miles of Alexandria in the evening of the 29th, with three “human torpedoes” and their six crew members on board. They were to attempt to enter Alexandria harbour and attack units of the Mediterranean Fleet, but, their quarry being at sea, *Gondar* was ordered to return to Tobruk, where she was bound when attacked by *Stuart*.⁶ From the accounts of prisoners, she was on the surface charging batteries when *Stuart* was sighted, and had immediately dived. It was during the dive that the explosion had been felt of the depth charges in *Stuart*’s opening attack. Those in the second attack appeared to burst below the submarine, and put all lights out, damaged instruments and gauges, and caused leaks through the stern glands and elsewhere. Evasive tactics were tried without success. The submarine never got beyond sound of *Stuart*’s propellers, and the frequent high-speed crossing of the position by *Stuart* gave the impression that there were three destroyers engaged. Each time they heard *Stuart* race across overhead, the submarine’s crew huddled together in groups of four or five and waited apprehensively for depth charges to explode.

Teacher signalled to the Rear-Admiral, Alexandria, that he was attacking the submarine, and was told in reply that help in the hunt was on the way. At 6.30 a.m. on the 30th—five minutes after *Stuart*’s final depth charge attack—a Sunderland flying-boat, No. L2166, of 230 Squadron R.A.F., appeared, and later the trawler *Sindonis*,⁷ and the hunt was continued.

By this time the air purifying plant in the submarine was out of action, and increasing leakage of water necessitated increasing the air pressure, which was now three atmospheres with the air bottles almost exhausted. At about 9.20 a.m., after being submerged and constantly attacked for eleven hours, *Gondar*’s captain decided to surface. When some sixty feet from the surface a near-by explosion caused the submarine to dive out of control to a depth of over 300 feet. All tanks were then blown, and she surfaced at considerable speed, stern down.

The explosion was that of a bomb dropped from the Sunderland about 3,000 yards from *Stuart*, who was closing the position when *Gondar* surfaced off her starboard bow. *Stuart* opened fire immediately, and the aircraft dropped a stick of bombs which fell close to *Gondar*, whose captain ordered abandon ship while he set scuttling charges and opened vents. *Gondar* sank at 9.50 a.m.—about twenty-five miles off the Egyptian coast at El Daba—the explosion of about ten scuttling charges being heard

⁵ *Gondar*, Italian submarine (1937), 615 tons, one 3.9-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 14 kts; sunk in Mediterranean, 30 Sep 1940.

⁶ See Elios Toschi, *Ninth Time Lucky* (1955), translated from the Italian by James Cleugh.

⁷ HMS *Sindonis*, trawler (1934), 440 tons, one 4-in gun; sunk by enemy aircraft at Tobruk, 29 May 1941.

from *Stuart* as she closed in to attack. *Stuart* recovered twenty-eight survivors, including *Gondar's* captain and a destroyer captain who was taking passage in the submarine; and *Sindonis* picked up a further nineteen. Two of *Gondar's* crew were lost.

Stuart received a rousing welcome from her flotilla companions when she entered Alexandria late that afternoon. Waller, watching his old ship from the bridge of *Vampire*, signalled: "Whacko! You did not waste much time." *Vendetta* contributed "Whacko, Whiskers!", in delicate allusion to Teacher's beard. And the Commander-in-Chief in a general signal to the fleet later described *Stuart's* success as "An outstanding example of a result achieved by patience and skill in operation of asdic gear"—a feather in the caps of the asdic officers, Sub-Lieutenants Cree and Griffin, and the operators, Leading Seamen MacDonald and Pike.⁸

While *Stuart* was thus engaged, the fleet operation proceeded in what was becoming a pattern. About noon on the 30th September, reconnaissance aircraft from *Illustrious* sighted the Italian battle fleet—with four battleships including the new vessels *Littorio* and *Vittorio Veneto*—120 miles or so to the northward, and steering northwards. After some thought, and in view of the enemy's preponderance, the impossibility of coming up with him, and the importance of the troop convoy, Cunningham decided not to seek action but to proceed with the main object of reinforcing Malta. This was successfully accomplished that night, and the fleet returned to Alexandria. *Ajax*⁹ joined the 7th Cruiser Squadron at this time, and *Voyager*, who had completed her refit, sailed from Malta to join the fleet, and arrived at Alexandria on the 2nd October. On the fleet's return journey, *Orion* and *Sydney* were detached and at 10 p.m. on the 1st October, entered the Aegean through the Antikithera Channel and swept as far north as Tenedos. On the way back south, they carried out a minute-and-a-half's concentrated bombardment of Maltezana, chief port of Stampalia in the Dodecanese, and retired at high speed without encountering opposition. The two ships passed through Kaso Strait at 4 a.m. on the 3rd, and reached Alexandria at 7 p.m. that day.

All of the 10th Flotilla destroyers had a busy time at sea in the early days of October. The nine ships—as was *Sydney*—were engaged in an operation early in the month when the fleet covered the passage of another convoy to Malta. *Stuart*, with Robison back in command, stopped on three occasions south of Crete because of water in the oil fuel—it "evidently had leaked in through ship's side". There was a number of depth-charge attacks by various of the destroyers on suspected submarines on the voyage to Malta, but no hostile aircraft was sighted, probably because of bad weather and thunderstorms, nor were enemy surface forces reported.

⁸ Lt-Cdr T. S. Cree, DSC, VRD; RANVR. HMAS *Stuart* 1939-41. Of Sydney; b. Glasgow, 1 May 1914.

Lt-Cdr J. B. Griffin, DSC, VRD; RANVR. HMAS's *Stuart* 1940, *Voyager* 1940-41. Of Longueville, NSW; b. Mosman, NSW, 7 Mar 1912.

PO R. A. H. MacDonald, DSM; 20954, RAN. HMAS's *Stuart* 1939-41, *Vendetta* 1941, *Vampire* 1942. Of Footscray, Vic; b. Footscray, 14 Mar 1918. Died of wounds, 13 Sep 1942.

PO L. T. Pike, DSM; 20749, RAN. HMAS *Stuart* 1939-40. Of Annandale, NSW; b. Cowell, SA, 19 Aug 1916.

⁹ HMS *Ajax*, cruiser (1935), 6,985 tons, eight 6-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 32.5 kts.

Throughout the 11th October the fleet cruised south of Malta, and then set course for Alexandria covering an east-bound convoy. *Stuart* and *Vendetta* were left in Malta to refit. *Vendetta* was there until the 9th November, and *Stuart* until the end of the year.

Shortly before 2 a.m. on the 12th, when the cruisers were spread to the northward scouting in the moonlight, *Ajax* sighted a destroyer approaching on the starboard bow, and opened fire. At the same time *Ajax* was herself hit twice on the bridge by shells presumably from a second vessel shortly afterwards sighted on the port bow. *Ajax* increased to full speed and engaged both enemy ships, and within a few minutes the first—subsequently known to be the *Artigliere*¹⁰—was disabled and on fire, and the other blown up. A third enemy vessel was then sighted, engaged, and destroyed. Two more subsequently appeared, but escaped at high speed behind smoke screens.¹ The remainder of the cruiser squadron concentrated on the position on receiving the enemy report from *Ajax*, but were too late to intercept the escaping ships. At daylight *Ajax*, who suffered five more hits, and had thirteen of her crew killed and twenty-three wounded, was detached to Malta. Soon after daylight, British reconnaissance aircraft sighted the disabled *Artigliere* in tow of another destroyer. *Sydney* was one of the cruisers detached to attack these targets; but with the approach of the cruisers the towing destroyer slipped her tow and escaped with her superior speed. On abandoning the chase, the cruisers returned to the crippled ship and *York*²—another newcomer to the station—was detailed to sink her by gun fire and, having made certain she was abandoned by her crew, stood off and opened fire with her 8-inch guns. It was a lovely morning with perfect visibility and a glassy sea. From the remaining cruisers circling near by, *York's* shells could be seen crashing into the Italian ship until suddenly, about the fifth or sixth round, she disintegrated in a tremendous explosion, and only a great mushroom of smoke, billowing slowly up some two or three thousand feet, remained to mark her passing. *Vampire* picked up twenty-two survivors—including one officer—and Cunningham, in a plain-language signal, told the Italian Admiralty of the position of rafts with other survivors who were duly rescued by their own people.

On the return journey to Alexandria the fleet manoeuvred to the southward of Crete during the 14th October while aircraft from *Illustrious* and *Eagle* bombed Leros in the Dodecanese, and did considerable damage.

¹⁰ *Artigliere*, Italian destroyer (1938), 1,620 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 39 kts; sunk in Central Mediterranean, 12 Oct 1940.

¹ Commenting on this incident after the war, the German Admiral, Eberhard Weichold, who was liaison officer with Italian HQ in Rome in 1941 and subsequently German C-in-C Mediterranean, said that there were in all seven Italian vessels, four destroyers and three torpedo boats, of which *Ajax* accounted for three destroyers, and he described it as the first time an attack was carried out on the British forces in the Mediterranean by torpedo boats. He attributed the Italian losses without accompanying success to the clearness of the night, and the insufficient number of the boats employed in the tactical execution of the attack.

Italian losses on this occasion were one destroyer (*Artigliere*) and two torpedo boats of 679 tons (*Airone* and *Ariel*).

On the British side, *Ajax* suffered some difficulty "because of the blinding effect of the flash of her own guns, whereas the enemy were using flashless ammunition with good tracers". (Cunningham, p. 278.)

² HMS *York*, cruiser (1930), 8,250 tons, six 8-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 32.25 kts; sunk in Suda Bay, 22 May 1941.

The Italians retaliated with air attacks on the ships late in the afternoon, and *Liverpool* was torpedoed and had her bows blown off during one of these. She was taken in tow by *Orion* and, after some difficulty, reached port safely on the 16th, *Vampire*, *Dainty*, *Diamond* and *Decoy* being among the destroyers screening the two ships. By this time the Italians had developed night air attacks on Alexandria, and the battle fleet, proceeding ahead, approached the port during a heavy raid at 1 a.m. on the 15th in a most spectacular entry. "We made for the shallow water of the Great Pass at high speed," wrote Cunningham, "firing a blind barrage on both sides with our guns flashing and the sparkle of bursting shell all over the horizon."

At this time the recall of Tovey to the Admiralty to be appointed Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, led to changes of command in the Mediterranean. Pridham-Wippell became second-in-command and in command of the Light Forces; and Captain Rawlings³ of *Valiant*, with the acting rank of Rear-Admiral, was appointed to command the Battle Squadron in his stead. Both these officers were former destroyer captains of great experience and proved merit.

For the rest of the month *Stuart* and *Vendetta* were in Malta; *Waterhen* refitted at Alexandria from the 16th to the 29th; and *Vampire* was there from the 16th to the 25th cleaning boilers and engrossed in a domestic problem in the solution of which for two days the ship was cleared and "sealed and fumigated to get rid of bed bugs and cockroaches, both of these pests having invaded the ship in alarming numbers". Between the 25th and 28th of the month *Voyager* and *Vampire* were with the 2nd Division of the battle fleet—*Malaya*, *Ramillies* and *Eagle*—on a sweep towards Kaso Strait to cover an Aegean convoy and deliver an air attack on Maltezana. While this operation was in progress *Sydney* and *Orion*, with *Jervis* and *Juno*, entered the Aegean through Kaso Strait and went as far north as the entrance to the Dardanelles, exercising contraband control. Great interest, Collins noted, was aroused in *Sydney's* company by the glimpse of Gallipoli. During the morning of the 28th October, having passed through Kaso Strait south bound, *Sydney*, in common with other ships at sea, received orders to return to Alexandria with all dispatch. The fleet had to meet the new situation created by the Italian attack on Greece. *Sydney* crossed the Mediterranean at 28 knots, and entered harbour at 6 p.m. that day.

XVII

Meanwhile, in the Red Sea, Italian destroyers based on Massawa made their presence known in the first venture of enemy surface forces in this area. During the night of the 20th-21st October they made a brief sortie against a northbound convoy, and came off second best. Up to then, attacks on Red Sea convoys had been mostly by high-level bombing with little success, though the scale of attack had at times been considerable. On the

³ Admiral Sir Bernard Rawlings, GBE, KCB; RN. Comd HMS *Valiant* 1939-40; R-A Cdg 1st Battle Sqn 1940; comd 1st Cruiser Sqn 1941; Asst Ch of Naval Staff, Foreign, 1942-43; F.O. W Af 1943, E Mediterranean 1943-44; 2nd i/c British Pacific Fleet and comd British Task Forces 1944-45. B. 21 May 1889.

5th September a convoy escorted by *Hobart* was attacked eight times in one morning without damage, and throughout that month and October other convoys were bombed, but only one ship was damaged—s.s. *Bhima* (5,280 tons), which was holed by a near miss on the 20th September, and towed to Aden and beached.

Two days before this incident those in *Parramatta*, then lying in Aden, "were delighted to welcome H.M.A.S. *Yarra* from Colombo, come to join the Red Sea Force". Their pleasure was no doubt heightened by the fact that the newcomer brought them the first "comfort" parcels they received from Australia—and the only ones they received in a long time. *Yarra* left Australia on the 28th August. On passage she spent a few hours at Cocos Islands, and the ship's company were landed on Direction Island to bathe, where, twenty-six years earlier, the German cruiser *Emden* landed a party to destroy the wireless station shortly before she was herself destroyed by the first *Sydney*. Aden gave *Yarra* her first taste of enemy action in two air raids on the night of her arrival, and she quickly entered the routine life of the force; on Perim patrol, escorting convoys up and down the Red Sea, and intercepting blockade-running dhows.

She left Aden on the 18th October as part of the escort of convoy BN.7, the other escorting ships being *Leander*, *Auckland* and *Kimberley*. The convoy was bombed without result when south-east of Massawa in the early forenoon of the 20th October, and that night found *Yarra* zig-zagging over a calm sea on the starboard bow of the convoy in bright moonlight. A few minutes before 11 p.m., when the convoy was east of Massawa, two ships were sighted approaching from ahead at high speed. Harrington—*Yarra's* commanding officer—challenged them, and in reply the flash of a torpedo discharge from the leading ship was seen. Harrington immediately made an enemy report to *Auckland*, but before the signal was passed, shells from the enemy passed over *Yarra* and appeared to fall among the convoy. *Auckland* at once opened fire, followed after her first salvo by *Yarra*. It was believed by observers in the Australian ship that she scored a hit on the leading enemy vessel with her fourth or fifth salvo. In any case the Italians altered away, chased by *Leander* and *Kimberley*. *Leander* lost touch, but *Kimberley* intercepted one destroyer—the *Francesco Nullo*⁴—which went aground on Harmil Island off the northern entrance to Massawa, and blew her up with a torpedo at 6.33 a.m. on the 21st. *Kimberley*, while destroying *Francesco Nullo*, was herself hit in the engine room by a shell from a shore battery, and had to proceed on one engine which presently also failed, whereupon she was taken in tow by *Leander* to Port Sudan. Both ships were bombed on passage without harm. By the 30th October *Kimberley* was repaired to the extent of being able to steam at 25 knots and to remain in service with this limitation. A few hours after the destruction of *Francesco Nullo*, R.A.F. bombers claimed to have hit an Italian destroyer one mile east of Harmil Island. As *Kimberley* reported nothing visible above water of *Francesco Nullo*

⁴ *Francesco Nullo*, Italian destroyer (1925), 1,058 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 35 kts; destroyed, 21 Oct 1940.

after she blew up, the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, concluded that definite damage was caused to the second destroyer. Apart from the hit on *Kimberley*, no damage was suffered by ships of the convoy or escorting force. During this action the disadvantage under which the British were placed in night encounters through being temporarily blinded by the flash of their own guns, was again emphasised. With them it was an ever present and serious problem, whereas the enemy were provided with flashless cordite, and with good tracers to aid their shooting.

XVIII

Thoughts of an invasion of Greece had long lain in the mind of Mussolini. It was, he told a meeting of his war leaders on the 15th October 1940, only a few days before the event: "An action which I have matured at length for months, before our entry into the war, and before the beginning of the conflict." In the division of Europe between the dictators, he was anxious to secure Italian direction of Mediterranean policy, and not without apprehension of the turn things took with the German annexation of Czechoslovakia in 1939. The initial step towards the consolidation of the Italian politico-economic sphere was taken on Good Friday, 1939, with the invasion of Albania, which placed Italian troops on the frontiers of Yugoslavia and Greece. Britain's concern was reflected when, six days later, on the 13th April, the Chamberlain Government gave Greece a guarantee of help if Italy attacked her. For a while Italy protested her friendship for Greece; an attitude which continued after the outbreak of war in 1939, but which changed in 1940. In May of that year, when Italy's intervention in the war appeared imminent, the Allied Supreme War Council in Paris considered the likelihood of an Italian attack on Greece, and decided to make sure that Crete did not fall into Italian hands in such an event. Cunningham in the Mediterranean was told by the Admiralty that if Greek territory were attacked by Italy, expeditions were to start for Crete immediately, and without further reference to London or Paris. On the 31st May Cunningham told the Admiralty that arrangements had been made for British troops from Port Said, and French from Beirut, to land in Crete within a few hours of the order being given. The British and French naval commanders in the Eastern Mediterranean were wholeheartedly in favour of the proposed Cretan operation, which would give them Suda Bay as a refuelling base for light craft.⁵ The operation was, however, contingent upon Italy attacking Greece, and the attack did not immediately develop. Mussolini wanted time to build up his strength in Albania. As this was achieved, the Italian tone towards Greece changed into a growing flow of hostile propaganda, with accusations of helping the British and ill-treating Albanian minorities.

⁵ In Aug 1939, the C-in-C's yacht *Aberdeen* (990 tons), under cover of a pleasure cruise, made surveys of anchorages in southern Greece, the east end of Crete, and Antikithera and Kithera Islands, for tankers in the event of war. When Italy entered the war, but before she attacked Greece, these anchorages were used by the British for refuelling. "But the Italians became aware of it, bombed our ships in Greek waters, whereupon the Greeks naturally protested to us and demanded their withdrawal." Cunningham, pp. 212 and 282.

In August 1940 British information showed a rapid increase in Italian forces in Albania; and on the 15th of the month there was a further pointer to events when an Italian submarine sank the small Greek cruiser *Helle*⁶ which, dressed with flags in honour of the Feast of the Assumption, was lying peacefully at anchor off the mole at Tinos, in the Cyclades. "The incident," recorded Ciano in his *Diary*, "threatens to become serious. As for me, I consider the intemperance of de Vecchi [Count Cesare Maria de Vecchi, Fascist leader] at the bottom of it. I confer with the Duce, who desires to settle this incident peacefully."

The desired "peaceful" settlement was merely to suit the timing of the Italian moves in Africa. On the 19th September, when British Somaliland had been occupied and the Egyptian frontier crossed, Mussolini was taking Ribbentrop into his confidence regarding Greece.

There remains, he told the German Foreign Minister, the problem of Yugoslavia and Greece. Italy has half a million men on the Yugoslav frontier, and two hundred thousand on the Greek frontier. The Greeks represent for Italy what the Norwegians represented for Germany before the action of April. It is necessary for us to proceed with the liquidation of Greece, all the more so as when our land forces will have advanced into Egypt the English Fleet will not be able to remain at Alexandria, and will seek refuge in Greek ports.

On the 15th October occurred the meeting of Italian war leaders at which they were told by Mussolini that he had decided to attack Greece on the 26th October, to secure the whole coast of southern Albania, Ionian Islands, Zante, Cephalonia, and Corfu, and occupy Salonika. This would be followed by the complete occupation of Greece, to put her out of action and ensure she remained in the Italian politico-economic sphere. The Italian General Staff was perturbed at the prospect of this adventure, and two days later Marshal Badoglio told Ciano that the forces then available were insufficient, and that the navy did not feel that it could carry out a landing at Preveza—on the west coast of Greece a little south of Corfu—because the water was too shallow. But Mussolini, whether or no these views were expressed to him, was determined on action, and on the 19th October wrote to Hitler, telling him of his decision. It was a matter of which Hitler had hitherto heard "only in general terms", and when, after some delay, he received the letter from his Italian colleague, he immediately replied suggesting a meeting with the hope, as he told Mussolini later when the die had been cast, of being able to expound his views *before* the threatened action against Greece had been taken.

Finally the date for the attack was fixed at the 28th October, and Greece was given no chance to temporise. Six days earlier Ciano began to draw up the ultimatum for Grazzi, the Italian ambassador, to hand to Metaxas, the Greek Prime Minister, at two o'clock in the morning of the 28th. "Naturally," Ciano confided to his *Diary*, "that is a document that allows no way out for Greece. Either she accepts occupation or she will be attacked." The ultimatum demanded that the whole of Greece should be opened to Italian troops. It was rejected. At 5.30 a.m. Greece was

⁶ *Helle*, Greek cruiser (1913), 2,083 tons, three 6-in guns, 15 kts; sunk 15 Aug 1940.

invaded from Albania, and Italian aircraft raided Patras at the entrance to the Gulf of Corinth; Corinth; and Athens. "We attack in Albania," recorded Ciano, "and carry on a conference at Florence"—that which Hitler had suggested in his reply to Mussolini's letter of the 19th. "In both places things have gone well." But such satisfaction was premature. The Greek Government invoked the guarantee of British help given in April 1939; and the resistance of Greek forces on the frontier was immediate and strong. This was to be no easy invasion for the Italians.

In Alexandria, Cunningham at once ordered forces at sea to return to port to refuel, and preparations were made to establish a naval base in Crete; Longmore dispatched a fighter squadron to Greece; and the maximum scale possible of air reconnaissance was instituted in the Ionian Sea and off Crete. The urgent naval tasks were to run a convoy to Suda Bay, and to prevent action by the Italian Fleet, either against the convoy or in direct support of the invasion.

A few minutes after midnight on the 28th October, *Sydney*, in company with *Orion*, *York*, and *Gloucester* of the 7th Cruiser Squadron, sailed from Alexandria. Early in the forenoon of the 29th a joint services commission left Alexandria by flying-boat for Crete, to arrange with the Greek authorities there for the establishment of the Suda Bay base. At 2 p.m. that day the first Crete convoy—of four ships including two oilers—with the net-laying vessel *Protector*, and with *Vampire*, *Voyager* and *Waterhen* in the escorting force, sailed from the Egyptian port for Suda Bay.

The 7th Cruiser Squadron joined Cunningham in *Warspite* with the rest of the fleet in company to the west of Crete on the 30th. Throughout that day the fleet swept to the northward as far as the latitude of Cephalonia, course being altered to the southward when to the west of that island at 3.30 a.m. on the 31st. At dawn the fleet was off the west coast of Greece, and remained within sight of the land all day; and for the following night and for most of the 1st November remained to the west of Crete. It was sighted by Italian aircraft, but there was no reaction by enemy surface forces, and air reconnaissance from Malta showed the Italian Fleet still in its bases.

Under this cover, and protected by its close escort, the convoy reached Suda Bay safely in the evening of the 31st October and early morning of 1st November. A fuelling base was thus made available, and guns, stores, and equipment were off-loaded from the storeships. On the 1st also arrived *Ajax* with a battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment, Bofors guns and crews. That afternoon occurred the first of many enemy air raids on Suda Bay. Twenty-five aircraft took part, and there was some damage and a number of casualties ashore. By evening of the 1st November the troops, guns and stores had been disembarked; a battery site and dump established; and one indicator net laid by *Protector*. By midnight on the 2nd November the fleet was back at Alexandria, having suffered no enemy interference other than a fruitless attack by torpedo bombers on the 1st Battle Squadron, *Eagle*, and 7th Cruiser Squadron during that afternoon. "From now," Cunningham wrote later in *A Sailor's Odyssey*,

"until the first week in December, our cruisers and destroyers were hard at it covering and escorting the convoys to Piraeus and Suda Bay. They had no rest." This was true. The inclusion of Greece in the war brought with it a fuelling base at Suda Bay. But it brought also fresh commitments for an already burdened Mediterranean Fleet. The Greek Navy was small, consisting only of one old battleship and one old cruiser, ten destroyers, thirteen torpedo boats, six submarines, and auxiliary craft.⁷ Convoys for Greece and Crete called for British escorts through the Aegean. Enemy aircraft and submarines were active in the area, and the Italian Fleet, though so far quiescent, was very much "in being". A means of modifying this last mentioned factor was in preparation.

When *Illustrious* arrived in the Mediterranean at the beginning of September she brought with her Rear-Admiral Lyster⁸ to take command of the carrier squadron. In his first interview with Cunningham he raised the matter of an attack by his aircraft on the Italian Fleet in Taranto Harbour, and was encouraged by Cunningham to develop the idea. Plans were accordingly laid, and reached the stage when it was decided to celebrate Trafalgar Day by carrying out the operation on the 21st October. A fire in a hangar in *Illustrious* caused postponement to the 11th November, when the moon was suitable. It thus became part of a complex operation which included also the passage of fleet reinforcements through the Mediterranean from the west; and the passing of Malta and Aegean convoys. *Sydney* and the Australian destroyers—except *Stuart* refitting in Malta—took part.

In its general outline the operation followed the course of the earlier reinforcement in September. The convoys for the Aegean and Malta sailed from Port Said and Alexandria on the 4th November, with *Vampire*, *Waterhen*, *Voyager*, *Dainty* and *Diamond* of the 10th Flotilla among their escorting destroyers. *Sydney* and *Ajax* embarked troops, army stores, ammunition and guns at Port Said and sailed in the afternoon of the 5th for Suda Bay. Between them the two ships carried a thousand troops and a Bofors battery. *Sydney* took on board 32 officers and 450 other ranks, and had all available space on her upper decks, including most of the quarterdeck, piled high with cases of food, two motor-trucks, two Bofors guns, and packs and personal equipment. The weather was fine and the sea flat, and the passage was made across the Mediterranean, and through Kaso Strait in daylight, at high speed without interference by the enemy, and the two ships reached Suda Bay during the afternoon of the 6th.

The Cretan harbour appeared peaceful and remote from war. Almost landlocked, its eight or nine square miles of deep, still water sheltered on three sides by hills and mountain ridges with quiet villages and olive groves on the slopes, it induced a deceptive sense of security. Actually, as experi-

⁷ *Kilkis*, Greek battleship (13,000 tons), bought from USA in 1914; *Averof*, Greek cruiser (9,450 tons), bought from Italy in 1909. The 10 destroyers included four "Hydras" bought from Italy in the 1920's, and *King Georges I* and *Queen Olga* (each of 1,350 tons) laid down in England and completed in the late 1930's. The six submarines were bought from France in the 1920's.

⁸ Admiral Sir Lumley Lyster, KCB, CVO, CBE, DSO: RN. Fifth Sea Lord and Ch of Naval Air Services 1941-42; Aircraft Carriers, Home Fleet, 1942-43; FO Carrier Training 1943-45. B. 27 Apr 1888.

ence was to show, the hills were a menace to the ships in the bay. They screened the approach of enemy aircraft which, with their motors switched off, could swoop silently down into the bay, drop their bombs, and be away again behind the ridges in a matter of seconds. This time, however,



there were no attacks. *Sydney*, alongside the pier, did a good job in disembarking her troops and equipment, lorries, guns, and 200 tons of miscellaneous stores, in two hours, with no cargo handling appliances on the pier. It was, literally, a case of "all hands and the cook" manhandling the cargo. "Such a hive of industry," one of *Sydney's* officers recorded, "I have never seen before or since." The job completed, *Sydney* moved out to the bay and anchored for the night.

On the day of *Sydney's* arrival in Crete the Commander-in-Chief in *Warspite*, with *Illustrious*, *Valiant*, *Malaya*, *Ramillies* and destroyers—including the remainder of the 10th Flotilla, *Decoy* and *Defender*—sailed from Alexandria to the westward to cover the convoy movements and to meet the reinforcements in the Central Mediterranean. The reinforcements—the battleship *Barham*, cruisers *Berwick* and *Glasgow*, and destroyers *Gallant*, *Greyhound* and *Griffin*—left Gibraltar on the 7th November accompanied by Force “H” with *Ark Royal*, whose aircraft bombed Cagliari as on the previous occasion.⁹

By the evening of the 7th the Mediterranean Fleet was to the west of Crete, where it was joined by *Sydney*, who left Suda Bay around noon. Before sailing she had seen there *Vampire* and *Waterhen*, who arrived escorting the Suda Bay convoy and later joined that for Malta. During the passage to that island formations of enemy bombers were sighted but no attacks were delivered. The convoy reached Malta on the 9th, and that night the fleet went to the south of Malta, which was in sight 25 miles to the north-east at daylight next morning. During the forenoon the reinforcements, having safely traversed the Sicilian Narrows, joined the fleet from the westward and then went in to Malta to disembark troops and refuel. That day a Malta convoy sailed for Alexandria escorted by *Ramillies*, *Coventry*, and destroyers including *Vampire*, *Waterhen*, *Voyager*, *Decoy* and *Defender*; and *Vendetta*, her refit completed, also sailed from Malta escorting the monitor *Terror* to Suda Bay, where the two ships arrived on the 13th. The improvements in Malta's defences, of which *Terror* had formed part, enabled her to be dispensed with there in favour of Suda Bay until the shore defences of the new base could be strengthened.

Throughout the 10th the fleet manoeuvred south-west of Malta, and at 6 p.m. the cruisers parted company to search in pairs to the north-east. Dawn of the 11th found the fleet heading into the Ionian Sea, where the cruisers rejoined at 9 a.m. to the south-east of the toe of Italy. The stage was thus set to cover the Malta convoy, and to carry out the main operation—the air attack on the Italian Fleet.

During all these movements of the British forces, the Italian Fleet remained in its bases, with the capital ships concentrated at Taranto. When, on the 17th October, Badoglio told Ciano of his apprehensions at the coming attack on Greece, he said that when the attack was made the fleet should immediately be withdrawn from Taranto to a safer base. This was not done. A reconnaissance maintained over the port by R.A.F. aircraft from Malta showed five battleships there, and during the 11th a sixth entered the harbour.¹ The ships were protected by nets, barrage balloons, and anti-aircraft defences; and presumably it was considered

⁹ HMS *Glasgow*, cruiser (1937), 9,100 tons, twelve 6-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts.

HMS *Gallant*, destroyer (1936), 1,335 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; damaged by mine, 10 Jan 1941, taken in tow; bombed and sunk in Malta Harbour, 20 Jan 1941.

HMS *Griffin*, destroyer (1936), 1,335 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

¹ This reconnaissance was maintained by No. 431 Flight, a special unit equipped with 4 Glenn Martin aircraft and commanded by F-Lt E. A. Whiteley, an Australian in the RAF.

that these, supported by air attacks on the British ships, afforded security.² Such air attacks took place on the fleet during the 10th when to the south of Malta, without success for the attackers; and shadowing aircraft were driven off by fighters from *Illustrious* on the 11th. The Italian attacks, of small scale and not pressed home, were no deterrent to the operation.

In addition to the attack on Taranto, a subsidiary operation had been arranged, a raid by cruisers and destroyers through the Strait of Otranto into the Adriatic, while aircraft of the R.A.F. bombed Valona and Durazzo in Albania. Shortly after 1 p.m., when the fleet was midway between Sicily and Greece, *Sydney* and *Ajax*, with the destroyers *Nubian* and *Mohawk*, were detached to join Pridham-Wippell in *Orion*, and course was set to the northwards. Five hours later *Illustrious*, supported by the 3rd Cruiser Squadron and four destroyers, was also detached and proceeded to her flying off position about forty miles west of Cephalonia. She arrived there about 8 p.m., and by 8.40 the aircraft of the first of two striking forces were in the air and forming up. The defenders of Taranto heard their motors and opened up with anti-aircraft fire shortly before 11 p.m., just as *Sydney* and her companions passed northward through the Strait of Otranto.

The northward passage of the cruiser force was without incident. During the daylight hours preparations were made in the ships for towing or being towed, and for repairing any damage which might be suffered during the night. Dusk found them steaming at around twenty knots over a smooth sea, just south and west of Corfu and starting the run into the Strait. With nightfall Collins told *Sydney's* ship's company of their destination and objective of "looking for trouble", and hands went to action stations. The night was bright, with a full moon bathing the darkened ships in its deceptive misty light; and quiet except for the rustle of the water and the muted ship noises. *Orion* led the cruisers in line ahead, with *Ajax* and *Sydney* following at intervals of three to four cables, and the two destroyers spaced broad on either bow. Aft and above *Sydney's* compass platform, where Collins and the small bridge group were on the alert, the gunnery control team in the director tower exercised the turrets in "dummy runs" against imaginary targets. In the turrets, shells lay in the loading trays, and trainers and layers were at the controls. Watertight doors in the 'tween decks were secured, and little groups at their respective action stations waited ready, those not immediately engaged filling in time by reading, yawning, playing cards or dozing. Down below in the glittering engine and boiler rooms the staff went about their usual job of maintaining steam and revolutions to the roar of the blowers and the hum of turbines.

There was no sign of an enemy in the narrows, and Pridham-Wippell led his force on into the Adriatic, away north of Otranto and past Valona to the latitude of Brindisi, before turning at one o'clock in the morning of the 12th in a wide circle to starboard for the return run of the Strait. Shortly after the turn, at 1.20 a.m. when the force was steering S.S.E.

² The Italians may have shared the views of Admiral Pound. To the First Sea Lord the projected naval air attack on the Italian Fleet "always appeared as the last dying kick of the Mediterranean carrier before being sent to the bottom". Cunningham, p. 273.

at 20 knots, six darkened ships—four merchant vessels and two escorting destroyers—were sighted making across to the Italian mainland from Valona Bay. *Sydney's* main armament was directed on to the leading merchant ship, but fire was held to achieve surprise and close range, the British force altering course towards to south-east. At 1.27 a.m. *Mohawk*, nearest to the enemy, opened fire and, surprise being no longer a consideration, action became general. *Sydney* opened fire on the leading merchant vessel at 7,000 yards, and rapidly scored hits and set the target on fire. For a brief interlude the peace and quietness of the night was shattered, and to the light of the moon was added the flash of gun fire, the yellow glare of slowly falling star shells, and the flames of burning ships; while occasional green tracer shells fired by the enemy escorts flared across the sky, one passing close over *Sydney's* bridge.

From the time of opening fire at 1.27, the action lasted twenty-three minutes, during which one ship of the convoy was sunk, two set on fire and almost certainly destroyed, while the fourth was damaged but escaped under cover of smoke.³ The escorting destroyers escaped, though one was damaged. *Sydney* scored hits on three merchant ships, and also engaged a destroyer. Four minutes of her action gives an idea of the speed of proceedings. After scoring hits on her second merchant ship target Collins recorded that between 1.36 and 1.40 a.m.:

Target was shifted to escorting destroyer which steaming from left to right making smoke. Five salvos fired at this target which drawing ahead. At 1.38 fire shifted to original targets, now close together. Several salvos fired and more hits seen. These targets disappeared and target shifted again one ship right to ship apparently stopped. Other ships also firing at this target and many hits seen.

At 1.40 a torpedo attack was seen to pass under *Sydney's* stern at right-angles to her course, and eight minutes later she herself fired two torpedoes at one of the merchant ships. At 1.50 the action ceased, and at 1.57 the force—having suffered no damage or casualties—was steering south by east for the Strait at 28 knots, passing through without interference at 3.30 a.m., and joining the fleet off the west coast of Greece at 11.15 a.m. on the 12th November, when Cunningham greeted Collins with the signal "Did you have a wild Australian night?", to which "a suitable reply was made".

Collins, in his Letter of Proceedings covering this period, described the operation as

not without its element of excitement as three 6-inch cruisers found themselves well to the north of the Narrows with Italian bases containing vastly superior forces in their rear. The possibility of a speed hit from aircraft, E or U-boat, was in mind. It was fortunate that the torpedo fired by a convoy escort missed astern of *Sydney*.

On the way south to rejoin the fleet, the cruisers sighted *Illustrious* and her supporting force also steering south to rejoin after Taranto. The secret of that attack had been well kept, and not until, during the forenoon of the 12th, *Sydney* intercepted a signal from the carrier giving a report

³ According to an Italian account, published after the war, all four merchant vessels, totalling 16,938 tons, were sunk.

of the operation, did the ship's company know that theirs had not been a lone adventure the previous night, and the reading of the news over the ship's loud speakers was greeted "with a burst of frenzied cheering".

In all it had been a bad few hours for the Italians. Subsequent information confirmed that at Taranto, of the battleships *Littorio* (later renamed *Italia*) was hit by three torpedoes and sank; *Conte di Cavour* was hit by one torpedo and sank; and *Caio Duilio*, hit by one torpedo, sank by the bows. The cruiser *Trento* was hit by a bomb which perforated deck and side but failed to explode; and two destroyers were damaged by near misses. In the Adriatic a convoy was practically destroyed, and the air attack on Durazzo did serious damage. "A black day," Ciano called it, remarking that the battleships would remain out of the fight for many months. But Mussolini, contrary to his Foreign Minister's expectations, was not downhearted at the news, and "does not at the moment seem to have fully realised its gravity". There was a touch of irony in the fact that on the 11th November, the day of the Taranto raid, Italian aircraft cooperated with the German Air Force in a daylight raid on London, an honour accorded at the insistence of Mussolini. Thirteen of the Italian aircraft—seven bombers and six fighters—were shot down.

The success of the attack on Taranto led to Cunningham agreeing to a repetition on the night of the 12th November, but bad weather caused the cancellation of the project, and the fleet returned to Alexandria, where it arrived without incident on the 14th of the month.

The results of the attack on the Italian Fleet at Taranto illustrated with dramatic force the potency of naval aviation as a striking weapon. "In a total flying time of about six and a half hours—carrier to carrier—twenty aircraft had inflicted more damage upon the Italian Fleet than was inflicted upon the German High Sea Fleet in the daylight action at the Battle of Jutland."⁴ The effect upon the naval strategical situation in the Mediterranean was immediate and far reaching. Naples became the main base of the Italian Fleet, and thus the threat of surface action against the Aegean and Malta convoys was reduced, as Italian entry into the Central Mediterranean through the Strait of Messina came under closer observation of the R.A.F. reconnaissance from Malta. The reduction in Italian capital ship strength enabled Cunningham to dispense with his slower battleships, and before the end of the month *Ramillies* sailed westward through the Mediterranean for home, soon after followed by *Malaya*. This in turn temporarily relieved the strain on the destroyers for fleet screening work. Of great importance was the stimulus to Britain and her friends, and the effect on British prestige, especially in the Middle East. "Just before the news of Taranto," the First Sea Lord wrote to Cunningham, "the Cabinet were rather down in the dumps; but Taranto had a most amazing effect upon them." It had a correspondingly depressing effect upon the morale of the Italian Navy which suffered—according to the German Admiral in Rome—through the Italian naval staff being "completely governed by the thought that the Italian Fleet must remain secure, for they fear, by throw-

⁴ Cunningham, p. 286.

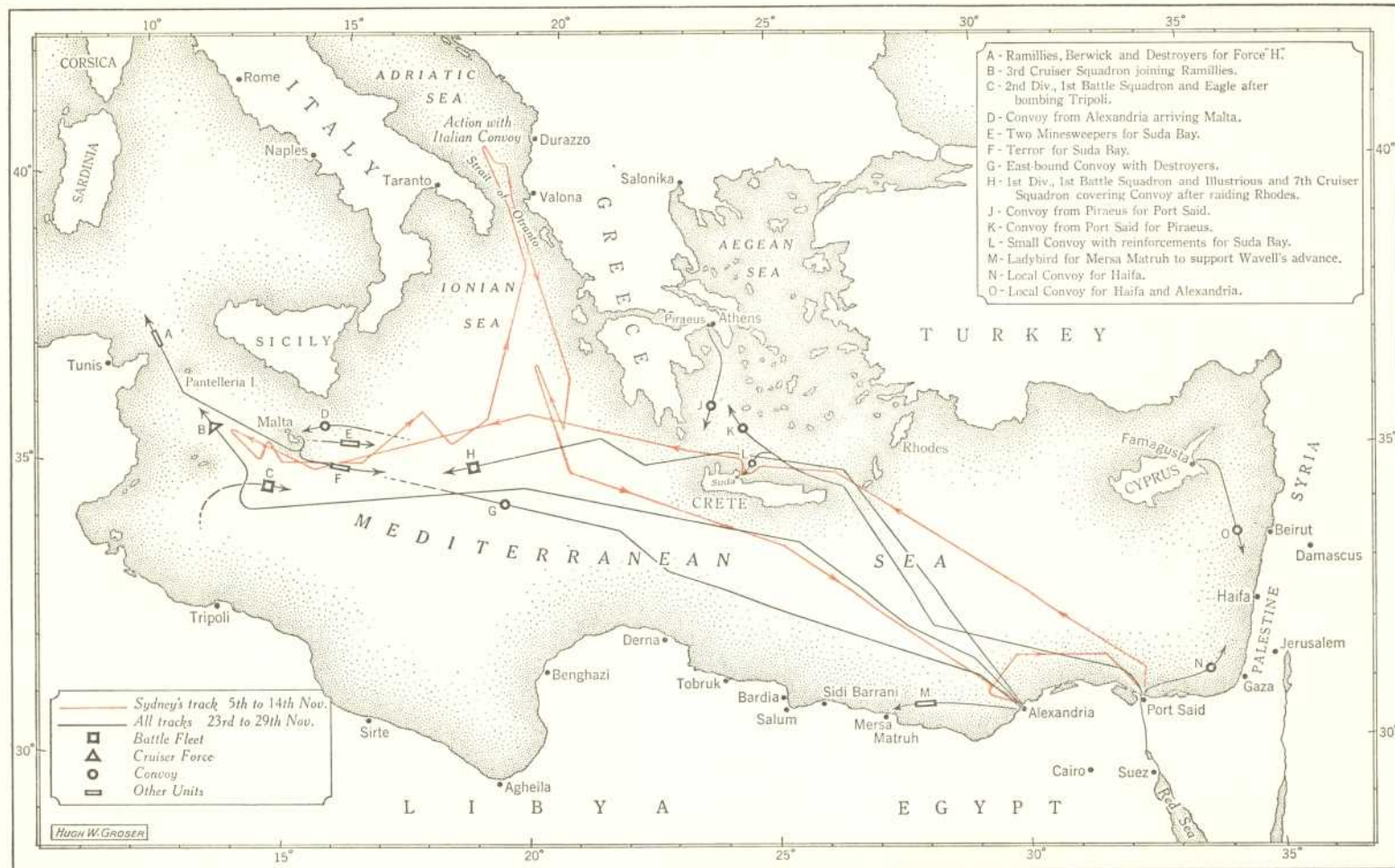
ing in their forces prematurely under unfavourable circumstances to be unable to carry out their main task—the assuring of the important sea communications in the Central Mediterranean”. The German Admiral saw Taranto as a direct consequence of this defensive attitude, an attitude which “cripples their power of decision, and eventually the offensive spirit of the Italian Fleet; it invites an ever stronger British offensive in Italian waters. If the strategic situation in the Mediterranean continues to develop in the present way, serious consequences are unavoidable in all theatres, especially in the land operations in Greece and North Africa. In order to mitigate these repercussions as much as possible, a radical change in the present Italian direction of the war is essential.” Changes in command were, in fact, shortly made. The Italian Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Cavagnari, resigned and was replaced by Admiral Riccardi; and Mussolini also accepted the resignation of Marshal Badoglio, Supreme Commander of the Italian Army. But the German Admiral complained that his representations for a change in naval policy met with no success.

The remainder of the month was a period of great activity for all units of the Mediterranean Fleet, covering and escorting complex movements of convoys to Crete and Greece, and between Malta and Alexandria. Between the 15th and 20th November *Sydney* was in the Aegean, and paid her first visit to Greece when she arrived at the Piraeus on the 16th, being one of five cruisers to enter the harbour carrying a total of some 4,000 troops with their stores, and receive a tremendous reception from the excited Greeks. *Sydney* made the 600-mile run from Alexandria to the Piraeus in twenty-one hours at an average speed of 30 knots. Back in Alexandria on the 20th, she sailed again on the 23rd to take part in an operation which took all forces to sea and covered the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean. During the following six days important troop and equipment convoys were passed through the Mediterranean to Malta, Alexandria, Crete and Greece; *Ramillies* and *Berwick* were passed westward through the Sicilian Narrows to join Force “H”, and the two new cruisers *Manchester* and *Southampton*, with some corvettes, came through to the Eastern Mediterranean.⁵ On the 26th of the month the fleet carried out air attacks, from *Illustrious* on the Dodecanese and from *Eagle* on Tripoli, at the two extremes of the Eastern Mediterranean. It was an indication of the measure of control of the sea established by the Mediterranean Fleet—and a feature of the operation was that, throughout it, not a single gun was fired by *Warspite* or any of the ships in company with her.

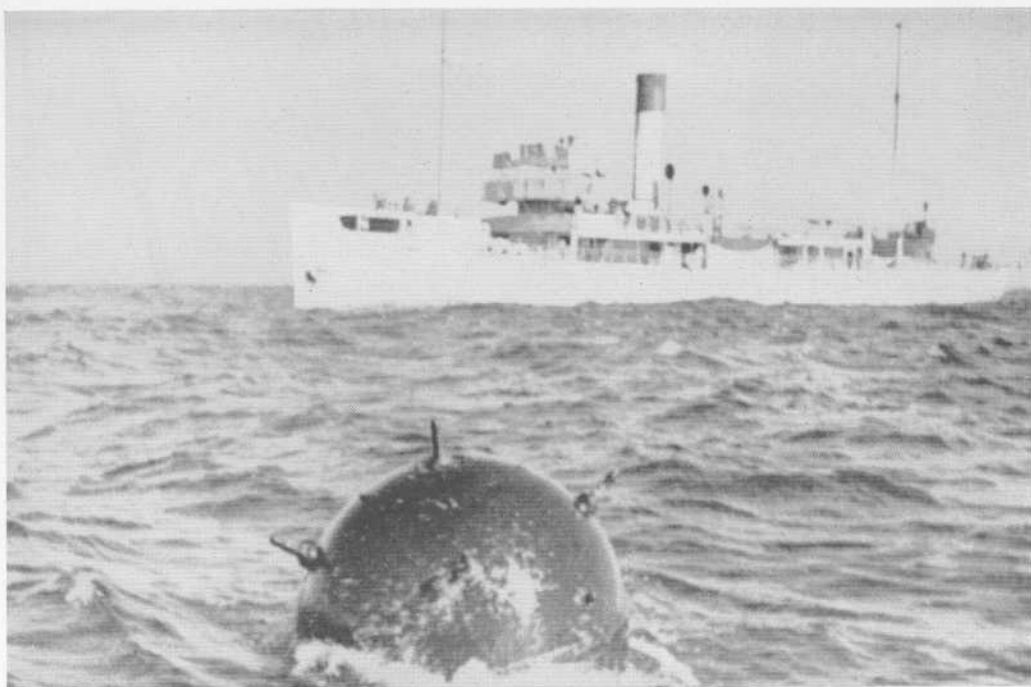
Sydney's track chart shows that during the seven-day period at sea in this operation she steamed 2,628 miles, passed twice north of Crete—westbound and eastbound—covering Aegean convoys, and penetrated the Central Mediterranean almost as far west as Pantelleria. She was in Suda Bay on the 24th, when three bombs, which fortunately did no damage,

⁵ HMS *Manchester*, cruiser (1938), 9,400 tons, twelve 6-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 32.3 kts; sunk by Italian submarine off Tunisia, 13 Aug 1942.

HMS *Southampton*, cruiser (1937), 9,100 tons, twelve 6-in guns, 32 kts; lost after action with German aircraft east of Malta, 11 Jan 1941.

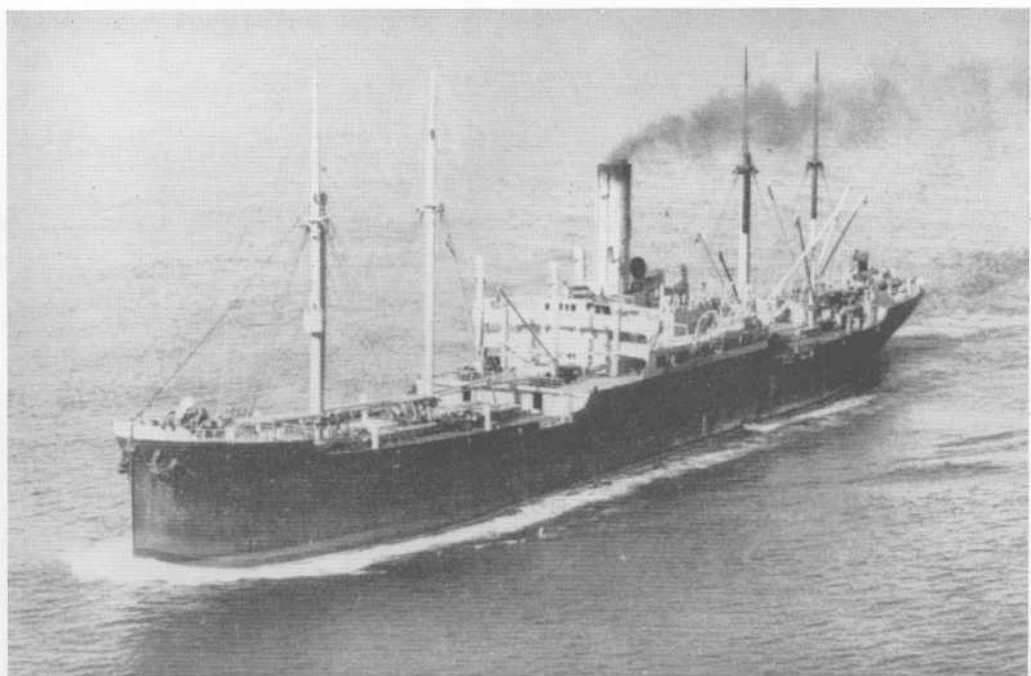


Operations in the Eastern Mediterranean, November 1940



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Floating Enemy Mine off Australian Coast, with Auxiliary Minesweeper in Background.



(R.A.A.F.)

Federal Steam Navigation Company's Steamer *Cambridge*.



Survivors from *Cambridge*
picked up by H.M.A.S. *Orara*,
coming ashore at Sealer's
Cove, Victoria,
8th November 1940.

(Chief Stoker A. J. Davis, R.A.N.)



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Survivors from *Port Brisbane* on Board H.M.A.S. *Canberra*, 23rd November 1940.

suddenly arrived in the harbour out of the blue from an aircraft too high to be sighted. On the 26th she was one of the covering force for *Eagle* during the air strike on Tripoli; and arrived back in Alexandria on the 29th.

The destroyers of the 10th Flotilla had a similarly active period, escorting Aegean and Malta convoys and on the battle fleet screen and, with the exception of *Stuart*, all taking part in the operations from the 23rd to the 29th. *Decoy's* participation was partial, for the western passage of the battle fleet only. The Italians were making up for lack of aggressiveness elsewhere by increasing their air attacks on Alexandria. *Voyager*, in harbour there from the 13th to the 21st, recorded that the port was raided on an average five times a day during that period. In a raid on the evening of the 13th November *Decoy* was struck by a bomb which did considerable damage and killed two officers and nine ratings. She sailed on the screen of the battle fleet on the 25th November to Malta for repairs, and her place in the 10th Flotilla was taken by *Wryneck*.⁶

XIX

The closing days of 1940 were invigorating and exciting for the Mediterranean Fleet. It had gained in strength in itself and was on the crest of achievement. Vis-à-vis the Italian Fleet after Taranto it was in an increasingly favourable position; and with the addition of *Illustrious* and the fighter protection she gave, had a large measure of control in the Central Mediterranean. Things were going well. The Italians, placed on the defensive in Greece and Albania by the enthusiasm and vigour of the Greek counter-attack, were shortly to be on the run in Egypt and Libya following a British land attack which opened on the 8th December. In the Aegean strength was being built up in Crete, where by the end of the year was a small garrison; two airfields; and harbour defences whose main lack was an efficient net defence against torpedoes. This shortcoming was the cause of *Glasgow* being hit by two torpedoes dropped from aircraft on the 3rd December, and she was fortunate in being able to return to Alexandria under her own steam, though badly damaged. The danger of air attack made it unwise for ships to remain in Suda Bay for lengthy periods, but the harbour provided a most useful advanced base, particularly for fuelling, and on four separate occasions during November either the 1st or 2nd Divisions of the battle fleet were there, and on the 17th December the Commander-in-Chief took the fleet in to refuel. In the Central Mediterranean, Malta, key to North Africa, reinforced with troops, aircraft, and anti-aircraft batteries, was on the way to earning the title "this fire spewing yellow water bug" later bestowed upon the island by a German dive-bomber pilot whose squadron was shattered in the endeavour to break down its defences.

The support and nourishment of Malta during the first six months of the Italian war was one of the most valuable achievements of the British navy and merchant service, as the failure to launch a full scale assault

⁶ HMS *Wryneck*, destroyer (1918), 1,100 tons, four 4-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts; sunk by enemy aircraft in Gulf of Navplion, 27 Apr 1941.

on the island in the period of its weakness was Italy's greatest mistake. The existence of Malta as a British base, even though its use by the Mediterranean Fleet was severely curtailed, limited the activity of the Italian Fleet in the Central Mediterranean and threatened Italy's vital communications with Libya. "Under these circumstances," wrote the German Admiral in Rome in August 1940, "the elimination of Malta as a British naval and air base becomes imperative. Going by present experiences this task cannot be left to the Italian air force alone." And he pressed, without success, a long series of plans for the elimination of Malta as the first condition for Italian control of the Central Mediterranean. Had such elimination been possible it might have been when Italy had the preponderance of naval power in the Mediterranean, and Malta's air fighting force consisted of four Hurricanes, and three Gladiators which had been left—still in their packing cases—by the carrier *Glorious*; and the garrison strength only permitted beach defence on an average battalion front of fifteen miles, with practically no reserves for counter-attack, as was the situation in the early months of the war, and before Italian strength had been committed to other ventures.⁷ As it was, Mussolini—without control of the sea and with his communications increasingly harassed by air, and later surface, attacks from Malta—not content with having his large armies in Africa placed in extreme jeopardy, now further dissipated his resources in the Greek adventure, while British strength in the Mediterranean was built up. Throughout November and December the reinforcement of Greece, Crete, and Malta continued in a series of involved operations which—together with the additional duties imposed upon it in supporting the British attack in Libya—employed the whole fleet in covering and escorting convoys and in carrying out air attacks and bombardments on Italian positions; and in one of these Cunningham took *Warspite* into Malta for a couple of days. It was her first visit since May, and was an illustration of the improved situation of the British in the Central Mediterranean.

This operation, which included an air attack on Rhodes; the passage of convoys through the Sicilian Narrows and of *Malaya* to the Western Mediterranean; and a cruiser raid into the Adriatic and a battleship bombardment of Valona, took place in the middle of December, and was the last major operation in the Mediterranean in which *Sydney* took part.

In October 1940, it was arranged between the Naval Board and the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, that *Hobart* should return to Australia, being relieved on the East Indies Station by *Perth*; and on the 28th November *Perth* sailed from Fremantle as part escort of A.I.F. convoy US.7, and to join the East Indies Station. During November and December ships were sunk by mines on the south and east coasts of Australia, and in the

⁷ After the war the German naval historians Assmann and Gladisch wrote: "At first neither the Germans nor Italians assessed adequately the extraordinary strategic importance of Malta, or they would have taken it before the enemy's defences could be strengthened, for its possession was vital to the safe transport of supplies to Tripoli. From the German viewpoint this operation should have been entrusted to the Italians in 1940 when the Mediterranean war was still regarded as primarily an Italian concern. The Axis attacks on Malta were therefore restricted to intensive air attacks—which however reduced their own strength on the African fronts—and to the mining of coastal waters. It is admitted that this only temporarily restricted the island's use as a base."

first week of December German surface raiders sank a number of ships off Nauru Island. On the 9th December the Naval Board, reviewing the situation and the naval commitments on the Australia Station, told the Admiralty: "We are finding it extremely difficult to meet them with resources now at our disposal," and proposed, among other things, that *Westralia*—which since July had been in the East Indies command—and either *Perth* or *Sydney* should return to Australia. This was approved by the Admiralty who, on the 15th December, told the Naval Board that *Westralia* would return to Australia as soon as possible; that *Sydney* would return as soon as relieved in the Mediterranean by *Southampton*—which was being redispensed from Indian Ocean convoy work to replace the damaged *Glasgow*—and that *Perth* also would be released from the East Indies Station to join the Mediterranean Fleet. *Perth*, which arrived at Aden on the 12th December (where she met *Hobart* who was on her way home to Australia), after a brief period of escort work in the Red Sea, passed through the Suez Canal on the 23rd December and reached Alexandria the following day. There, on the 27th-28th December she was painted in camouflage colours, and on the 30th replaced *Sydney* with *Orion* and *Ajax* in the 7th Cruiser Squadron.

On the day *Perth* passed through the Canal, *Sydney* reached Malta for docking and refit, following a period of activity largely in the Aegean, during which she had become well-known at the Piraeus in a series of visits.

The arrival of the cruisers and convoy at Piraeus on the second occasion of trooping (wrote Collins) aroused considerable enthusiasm, and it was remarkable that many of the population on the waterfront and in boats recognised the ship and called her name and cheered as she passed.

This visit to the Piraeus was made the first occasion of a mixed party on board *Sydney*, when Collins entertained some guests including Lady Palairot, the wife of the British minister: "They were delighted to taste white bread and good butter after months of black bread and rancid butter or margarine." During the first half of December *Sydney* was on a number of occasions in the Piraeus, and the ship's company had some of their rare runs ashore. Athens was *en fête* at this period. In Albania the Evzones, shouting "Aera! Aera!"—"Make room! Make room!"—were driving the Italians before them and had captured Argyrokastro; and in the streets of the Greek capital crowds of excited citizens cheered, chaired, and overwhelmed with hospitality the British sailors, soldiers and airmen whenever they appeared.

On the 17th December *Sydney* sailed from Suda Bay to join the fleet for the Adriatic operation, and at 8.20 the following morning took station with the 7th Cruiser Squadron—*Orion*, *Ajax*, *Sydney*—with the destroyers *Jervis*, *Juno* and *Janus*, on the port beam of the 1st Division of the battle fleet—*Warspite*, *Valiant*, *Illustrious*, with the 3rd Cruiser Squadron and destroyers—and the force pressed northwards along the west coast of Greece and close to Corfu in the teeth of a bitter north-east gale laden with drenching rain. Winter had come with a rush, and the coastal

mountains were snow clad almost down to the sea. Against this inhospitable background the heavy ships, closest inshore, smashed their way through seas which cascaded over the forecastles with every ponderous dive; to seaward of them the more lightly moving ships of the cruiser squadron flung the spray high from their bows; and to seaward again the squadron's three destroyers ploughed and pitched, at times almost hidden by enveloping sheets of water as they sliced through the larger waves. Woollen clothes were pulled out of lockers "almost overnight", and the Commander-in-Chief himself recalled in later years that "I was glad of a balaclava helmet knitted by my wife".

It had been intended to synchronise a bombing attack with the battleships' bombardment of Valona, but the weather caused the cancellation of this phase, and at dusk *Illustrious* and her escort were detached. A little earlier the 7th Cruiser Squadron and destroyers had increased speed and pressed on ahead for the Strait of Otranto, and at 10 p.m. passed through into the Adriatic.

By now the weather had fined. Gales, rain and overcast gave place to clear moonlight and a flat calm as the striking force sped into the Adriatic in the still cold. No enemy forces were sighted, and at 1 a.m. on the 19th, those in the force saw astern of them the flashes of the battleships' guns as they bombarded Valona. At 1.30 a.m. the cruisers were northward of the line Brindisi-Durazzo, and turned southwards to withdraw after the battleships, who had left after firing one hundred rounds of 15-inch shells into the Albanian port. The striking force passed southward through the Strait without incident at 5 a.m., and after a final visit to Suda Bay *Sydney* proceeded to Malta. She made her farewells to that island on the 8th January 1941 and, in company with *Stuart* who had completed her refit, sailed for Alexandria. Seventy-two hours later, after having exchanged valedictory signals with the fleet, *Sydney* sailed for the last time from the Egyptian base. On the 12th January she passed through the Suez Canal—she had to anchor for some hours in the Great Bitter Lake in a sandstorm—and on the 5th February reached Fremantle, where *Hobart* and *Westralia* had anticipated her arrival with theirs on the 28th December 1940 and the 3rd January 1941 respectively.

XX

In their months overseas, the ships of the R.A.N. had done much work and much hard steaming and, with the exception of the armed merchant cruisers, had on many occasions been in action with the enemy. *Hobart*, during the first twelve months of war, steamed 60,674 miles; spent 322 days in the tropics; and had steam on her main engines for 253 days. *Sydney*, during 1940, steamed over 66,000 miles, which was several thousand miles more than she covered in the four years of her pre-war life; and the destroyers' mileage was equally heavy. The greatest credit was due to the engine department staffs—and more especially those in the destroyers, which ships were feeling the weight of their twenty-two years or so of age—for the way in which they kept the ships running;

nearly always at short notice for steam, and called upon for frequent and prolonged bursts of high speed. Life in the smaller ships, the destroyers and sloops, involved "hard lying" for their companies, and this was particularly felt in the conditions in the mess decks resulting from the lack of ventilation at night when everything was closed down to darken ship, with, in the destroyers, the additional discomfort of wetness below in bad weather.

Walsh in *Vampire*, whose interest in the welfare of his ship's company was always keen, was outspoken in his Letter of Proceedings in July 1940, when he commented on the discovery of an advanced case of pulmonary tuberculosis in the ship

while several suspects were examined in the course of an inspection of all ratings. There is no doubt that this discovery, combined with poor ventilation and cracks in the deck which have developed lately, and which allow water to enter the mess decks in head seas, have had a worrying effect upon the ship's company.

Steps were taken to combat this by making such improvements as were possible, and these had the desired effect, "though no one is looking forward to winter and rough seas".

This comment brought a sharp reproof from Tovey, then Vice-Admiral Light Forces, who in a letter to Walsh—which, though marked "personal", was copied to the Commander-in-Chief, the Naval Board, the Rear-Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron, and Captain (D) 10—said:

The examination of the ship's company and the discovery of a number of suspects is a routine procedure; the number of suspects found in *Vampire* was unusually small, and none of them has since been confirmed as a T.B. case. Your statement that the discovery of this one case had a worrying effect on the ship's company is most improper; either it is unfounded, or it indicates that you allowed your ship's company, through ignorance which you took no steps to dispel, to become unjustifiably apprehensive over a perfectly normal occurrence.

This was at a time of stress and strain in the Mediterranean Fleet, and Tovey's concern that the morale of ships' companies should be maintained is understandable. It would seem, however, that it would have been equally "improper" for Walsh to have failed to comment upon an attitude of mind among his ship's company, its causes, and the steps taken for its correction.

Certainly the manner in which Tovey's rebuke was communicated to other authorities was open to objection. It constituted a method *pour encourager les autres* among junior commanding officers which was to be deprecated, since it might easily have deterred them from similarly incurring a mark of displeasure through bringing to the notice of their seniors matters which should have been made known to them.

That lack of ventilation in the destroyer messdecks was a major problem was made clear by the fact that in their refits in 1940, the installation of forced draught ventilating systems was an important item in the work undertaken. The defects of lower messdeck ventilation were experienced also in the two sloops in the trying heat conditions of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

A serious defect in the construction of the ship in the very trying climate in which she has been operating (wrote Walker of *Parramatta*) has been the ventilation of the enclosed lower messes and the galleys. Although probably adequate for peace conditions and less extreme climates, when battened down at night the spaces become unbearable.

In the case of all ships, hours were long, work was strenuous, and leave was short, with few opportunities for recreation. Collins gave *Sydney's* normal sea routine in November:

Ship's company work in two watches with all hands closed up for seventy minutes at dawn and dusk. By night second degree readiness, all hands at quarters. Some improvement was effected by closing in timber rack on the 4-inch gun deck, making primitive accommodation for eighteen men off duty to sleep. Known as "Bomb View Flats", this is much appreciated. . . . On normal return to base after an exacting six or seven days at sea there are usually heavy ammunitioning, boiler cleaning, and provisioning; A/A guns to man all night; ship to be cleaned; and little leisure. Leave is only possible when not duty cruiser, to one watch, and then only to 10 p.m.; with very rare all night leave. The average rating gets only about two turns of leave ashore in a month. Recreation facilities are poor.

There was a Fleet Club in Alexandria which provided some facilities, and in October an Australian Comforts Fund Club was opened there.

The Red Sea ships, working out of Aden, had even less opportunities of recreation for their crews.

The men hoped, of course—wrote Walker—to work from an interesting port, and were naturally disappointed to find themselves based on Aden, which can provide practically no attractions for them.

Port Sudan had more to offer. *Yarra*, there in November, managed to get organised hockey, cricket, and swimming matches against the R.A.F. and the Worcestershire Regiment.

In these matches (wrote Harrington) I am pleased to say our small ship's company was quite able to hold its own. There was considerable fraternisation between the ship's company and ranks of the Worcestershire Regiment, and much interest taken in their accounts of their recent engagements with the Italians in the Gallabat area.

Some of the ships' companies got breaks during refits. *Hobart* was refitting in Colombo for a month during October and November, and the ship's company had twelve days' rest in the holiday camp at Diyatalawa. *Parramatta* had ten days in Bombay during December, when her company were accommodated on shore. *Leander* was also there refitting, and "the two ships' companies merged harmoniously, receiving much kind entertainment from the residents of Bombay". The companies of the destroyers refitting in Malta were in some instances shore based for a while. *Stuart*, for example, was for a period of her refit so dismantled as to be uninhabitable, and her crew found accommodation in Maltese homes, those not on watch attending on board each morning until noon. While the crews were on board during refits at Malta, all hands, except fire parties left on board, had frequently to leave the ships for the shelters on shore during air raids. "Progress from the ship to the particular shelter

allotted to *Stuart* was extremely rapid, and served as effective training for any aspirant for the world's hundred yards championship."⁸

After the Dakar expedition *Australia* was with the Home Fleet and, based on Greenock, was occupied mainly on patrol and escort work. On 29th October she rescued—in a gale and high sea—nine of the crew of thirteen of a Sunderland aircraft which had force-landed on the sea west of the Hebrides. Early the following month she was ordered to join the force covering the approaches to Brest and Lorient in the hope of intercepting *Scheer* after the German raider's attack on convoy HX.84 on the 5th November, when five ships of the convoy, and the ocean escort—the armed merchant cruiser *Jervis Bay*⁹—were sunk; but machinery defects prevented her doing so. On the 18th November, after providing cover for Gibraltar and Sierra Leone convoys, she docked at Liverpool for refit. During the nights of the 20th, 21st and 22nd December, while she was in dry dock, Liverpool was the target for a series of heavy German air raids, and the ship narrowly escaped serious damage in the first of these. The dock had been flooded to three feet under the ship's floating draft as bomb protection, and on the night of the 20th a bomb fell in the water right alongside the ship and appeared to explode, though without causing any damage. Subsequent examination showed that the bomb was an aerial torpedo of about 3,500 pounds, and that the tail charge only had exploded. Slight damage was suffered the following night, when a 500-lb bomb fell near the port quarter, the explosion damaging the aircraft catapult and breaking ports in the captain's cabin. By the end of the month the refit was completed, and the ship again ready for service.

Morale in the Australian ships was high, especially where encounters with the enemy were frequent.

The recent warlike activities (wrote Collins of *Sydney* in July 1940) have had a very beneficial effect on the ship's company, who are in high spirits. Their health and conduct remains excellent and they have faced up to the somewhat trying conditions at sea with very little rest in an admirable manner.

Three months later, not long after *Yarra* had joined the Red Sea Force, Harrington reported:

The morale of the ship's company is very high, due partly to their interest being maintained by the fairly frequent opportunities of firing the guns. . . . I fear that some do not land even when they could do so in case they should miss an air raid.¹

All the Australian commanding officers wrote of the ready and unstinted cooperation of the Royal Navy.

The authorities on shore and the officers and men of the various ships and establishments of the Royal Navy have shown us invariable kindness, and have often gone to great trouble to help us (wrote Walker at the end of November). This has been a most happy feature of our service in these waters.

⁸ Clifford, *Leader of the Crocks* (1945), p. 126.

⁹ HMS *Jervis Bay*, armed merchant cruiser (1922), 14,164 tons, seven 6-in guns, 16 kts. (Her commanding officer, Capt Fogarty Fegen, RN, had, from January 1928 to August 1929, been Commander at the RAN College. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.)

¹ This was the ineffective high-level bombing of the Italians in the Red Sea. It was a different matter in the Mediterranean, especially after the dive bombers arrived. When Harrington's report quoted above was received in Navy Office, Melbourne, at the end of 1940, it was proposed to give publicity to it. Colvin vetoed the suggestion. "There is a lot of nasty bombing to come," he said.

In their six months of active warfare, all the ships' companies had become seasoned and practised teams. Under the tuition of the permanent service officers and men and the practical schooling of action with the enemy, the reservists—who made up a large proportion of the crews, particularly in the armed merchant cruisers, destroyers, and sloops—learned quickly and well. At the outbreak of war in 1939 few of the reservists had known anything about a ship or a gun. By the end of 1940 they had shown themselves, and the ships they helped to man, to be the peers of any afloat.

The reservists brought something fresh into the Navy (wrote the Flotilla Engineer Officer in *Stuart*). Instead of being a ship full of sailors talking about nothing but the sea and ships and grog and women, we were a team of sailors, clerks, rabbits, chemists, students, butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers, talking about everything under the sun . . . and women. War at sea is ninety-nine per cent utter boredom and one per cent spine chilling excitement. The Rockies entertained us ninety-nine per cent of the time and behaved like heroes during the one per cent of action. What more could one ask?²

Between them, ships and crews had seen many seas, fought in numerous engagements, and filled important places in the dispositions which enabled the British Navy to keep control of the ocean routes. Not the least of their contribution lay in their part in securing Egypt and the Middle East, and in protecting the successive convoys of Australian troops which crossed the Indian Ocean to help to build up the land forces there before the end of the year.

With the year's end some of the ships had returned to Australia. But the dawn of 1941 found a number still serving with the Royal Navy outside the Australia Station—*Perth* and the five destroyers in the Mediterranean; *Australia* in Great Britain with the Home Fleet; and *Parramatta* and *Yarra* with the Red Sea Force. And, H.M. Ships but manned by Australians, the armed merchant cruisers *Kanimbla* on the East Indies Station, and *Moreton Bay* and *Arawa* on the South Atlantic.

² Cdr (E) W. H. S. Rands, RAN, "The Rockies, God Bless 'Em" (1950)—an article in *Spindrift*, the journal of Flinders Naval Depot, Dec 1950, p. 41. "Rockies"—the sailor's name for reservists.

CHAPTER 6

AUSTRALIA STATION AND THE FAR EAST JUNE-DECEMBER 1940

THROUGHOUT 1940 active warfare was still distant from the Australia Station, but repercussions from the storm centres in the Atlantic and Mediterranean—already felt in the sinking of *Niagara* and the discovery of enemy mines in New Zealand waters—came in growing numbers and increasing force. In July the failure of merchant ships to reach their destinations was evidence that raiders were again operating in the Indian Ocean, and on the 9th of the month Admiral Colvin told the War Cabinet that the Norwegian *Tirranna*, with important A.I.F. stores on board, was many days overdue at Mombasa, a disappearance which was followed a few days later by those of the British ships *City of Bagdad* and *Kemmen-dine*. These were normal occurrences in sea warfare, and an increase in the scale of raider attack was to be anticipated as more German armed merchant cruisers became operative. Evasive routing and the consequent dispersal of ships on the ocean routes, with naval patrols affording such general cover as was practicable and hunting groups searching when the presence of a raider in any area was confirmed by a distress message from a victim, were means of meeting this threat. It was one which did not directly menace Australia's security and which was, outside the Australia Station, a problem to be met by the Admiralty, albeit with the assistance of Australian ships under Admiralty control. The immediate responsibility of the forces controlled by the Naval Board was the protection of coastal waters, and of shipping—especially of troop convoys—within the limits of the station. It was a responsibility shared by the army with its fixed shore defences, and by the air force with seaward reconnaissance and air cover within the range of its aircraft.

There were, however, other repercussions which carried greater weight, and suggested the possibility of the war storm covering the Pacific and beating on the shores of Australia. From Japan, events in Europe were watched with interest. Since the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the Japanese Army, modelled upon that of Germany and with officers who, always chauvinist, were now imbued with Nazi ideas, had steadily increased its political power. Moderating influences in Japanese policy were overawed by assassinations, and the idea of the "Imperial Way"—"the harmonious fusion of the true spirit underlying the foundations of Japan with the great ideal of the Japanese nation"¹—was popularised. National expansion was glorified and raised to religious duty. "The first Emperor," General Araki told the nation, "established the Imperial Army to extend the heavenly work. . . . We of the Imperial Army are leaders in displaying the Imperial Way." The Japanese Navy was different. Its traditions were formed on the British model, and it was the conservative element in the

¹ From the speeches of General Sadao Araki, *The Spirit of the Soldiers of our Empire*.

collective military dictatorship which governed Japan;² but a change in its attitude was apparent after 1935; a change which had begun to germinate after the Washington Conference in 1922. Angered by the limitations imposed by the naval treaties, and inspired by the acquisition of the mandated Pacific islands—the “anchored aircraft-carriers” paving the way to southern advancement—the navy began to see wider horizons beckoning it on. Behind lay the knowledge of Japan’s shortages in essential war materials, and the nation’s driving force became the hunger of the fighting services to increase their war potential by acquiring control of the tempting spoils within sight—the minerals of Manchuria and China; the oil and rubber and tin of the East Indies and Malaya.

The growing momentum of this force had long been apparent outside Japan. In China—invaded in July 1937—the war did not go according to Japanese plan and dragged on. Britain and America tried by peaceful means to stop it, but these were not sufficient. In December 1937, the Japanese “by mistake” sank the United States gunboat *Panay* (450 tons) by air bombing in the Yangtse River. An American naval court of inquiry brought out unmistakable evidence that the sinking was deliberate but, anxious to avoid war, the Government accepted the “mistake” theory, and in an unofficial but representative poll in America 70 per cent of those interviewed, and had an opinion on the subject, favoured a complete American withdrawal from China.³ The following year, in a series of amphibious operations, the Japanese Army occupied the shores of the South China Sea in an attempt to debar China from outside help. On the 3rd February 1939 the Japanese consolidated their position by seizing Hainan Island off the Lieuchow Peninsula, the southern extremity of China; and next month annexed Spratly Reefs, ninety-six coral islets barely above water but providing shelter in lagoons midway between North Borneo and French Indo-China. In May and June of that year, in an endeavour to eliminate British, French, and American influence in China, the Japanese Army made life as difficult as possible for shore nationals in Shanghai and began blockading the British and French concessions at Tientsin.

Britain was too preoccupied in Europe and too weak in the Far East to take any action other than to add to Japan’s difficulties in China by supplying the Chinese Nationalist Government with munitions to carry on the war, the main supply routes being overland through French Indo-China and Burma. The United States, however, after the Japanese move

² The Japanese constitution provided that the Emperor, as C-in-C, was advised on military and naval matters not by the head of the government but by the chiefs of the Army and Navy General Staffs and the War and Navy Ministers. The Minister of War was appointed by the High Command—the C.G.S., the Inspector-General of Military Training, and the Minister of War. He therefore helped to choose his own successor. The Minister of War was a Lieut-General or General on the active list; the Minister of the Navy a Vice-Admiral. The size of the army and navy were part of the Imperial prerogative reserved by the constitution for the High Command, and the government could not prevent any increase in the army or fleet which the fighting chiefs thought necessary. Theoretically a check was placed on the fighting chiefs by placing financial power in the hands of the legislature, but this power was reduced by a regulation which provided that if the budget for the year failed to pass, the appropriations voted for the previous year should automatically continue; and was further restricted by the practice of presenting military and naval five-year plans with continuing appropriations which, once voted, were beyond the control of the legislature.—Hugh Byas, *The Japanese Enemy* (1942), pp. 54-5.

³ S. E. Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol III (1948), pp. 17-18.

to Hainan Island and the Spratly Reefs, transferred the fleet—which had been concentrated in the Caribbean—to the Pacific. It passed through the Panama Canal on the 20th April. In the following July the United States took a further step and denounced the 1911 Treaty of Commerce with Japan, thus clearing the way for the imposition of economic sanctions when the treaty expired in January 1940. Before then the war broke out in Europe, with all the chances it might offer to Japan; they were chances Japan's leaders were agreed to seize upon as they arose. The only difference lay in the course to be followed—an immediate alliance with Germany and Italy, or to play a lone hand and take opportunity as it came. The second alternative was followed.

At this stage the situation of the United States vis-à-vis the Allies and that of Japan vis-à-vis the Axis powers were similar in that, though there was no question where respective interests lay, there was no guarantee to the Allies on one hand or the Axis on the other of present action to the point of war in any eventuality. The United States wished to prevent any formal alliance between Japan and the Axis which would give an opportunity of southward expansion, and through diplomatic channels counselled Japan to maintain strict neutrality; advice which Japan countered with suggestions that she be left with a free hand to settle the China "incident". In Britain, Mr Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, calculated the respective strengths of the Allied, Axis, United States and Japanese navies, and felt that Japan's main preoccupation was America, and that the naval balance was such that "in the first year of a world war Australia and New Zealand would be in no danger whatever in their homeland, and by the end of the first year we might hope to have cleaned up the seas and oceans".⁴ He realised that Britain could not defend a point north of Singapore in the Western Pacific if Japan entered the war, but believed that Singapore could be held until the Mediterranean was safe and naval forces could be diverted to the Far East.

Events in Europe in the second quarter of 1940 moved with a rapidity which had immediate effects in the Pacific. In April the Japanese Foreign Minister, General Arita, anticipating German moves on land, said that whatever happened to Holland "relations of economic interdependence and of co-existence and co-prosperity between Japan and the Netherlands East Indies must be maintained". The United States Secretary of State, Mr Cordell Hull, promptly declared that any armed intervention in the Netherlands East Indies "would be prejudicial to the cause of stability, peace and security in the Pacific". Shortly afterwards the American Fleet was moved from West Coast ports to Pearl Harbour "until further notice" because of the deterrent effect it was thought its presence might have on a possible Japanese advance into the East Indies. On the 10th May the German offensive in Western Europe began. Within six weeks the fall of France and the withdrawal of the French Fleet from the fight readjusted the balance of naval power in Japan's favour. On the 7th June General

⁴ W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol I (1948), p. 327.

Marshall,⁵ United States Chief of Army Operations, warned the commander in Hawaii to be on the alert "against an overseas raid from the west by a hostile Nation".⁶

According to the reports of the German Naval Attaché—Vice-Admiral Weneker—in Tokyo at that time, the Japanese Navy, early in April 1940, received "increased readiness" orders for attack on the Netherlands East Indies, operative from 1st May, together with instructions to be prepared for war against the United States and Britain. The final order for action depended on Germany's intentions in Holland, on which Japan sought information. But on the day—17th April—that Weneker was told this by the Japanese, it was repudiated by Vice-Admiral Kondo, the pro-German Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, who stated that for the present war with the United States and Britain must be avoided at all costs, and that Japan was trying to maintain the *status quo* in the East Indies. The Cabinet, then led by Admiral Yonai, was also anxious to pursue this policy.⁷

In Australia, the possibility of aggression in the Pacific was clear with the deteriorating situation in Europe, and a War Cabinet agendum of the 12th June raised the question "whether or not we should continue to rely on the pre-war undertaking that a British squadron of capital ships would proceed to Singapore immediately on hostile action in the Pacific". Six days later the whole question of Australian defence was reviewed at a War Cabinet meeting which discussed a press report that the probable peace terms to be imposed on France would include allotment to Japan of the New Hebrides and New Caledonia. Such a possibility was one of pressing concern to Australia. Possession of New Caledonia and the New Hebrides would give Japan naval bases from which, with her superior sea power, she could completely sever Australia's Pacific Ocean communications. Apart from the menace this would be to Australia, it was a prospect in a possible global war far more threatening to British interests than a German occupation of Dakar would have been.

The Chiefs of Staff were present at the War Cabinet, and Admiral Colvin told the meeting that he assumed that the British would remain in charge in the New Hebrides (which was administered under an Anglo-French Condominium) if the French failed to participate, but that New Caledonia was a purely French possession. Should the Commonwealth decide to carry out a military occupation of the islands it would be unable to hold them against Japanese action because of Japan's superior sea power. Commenting on a reference to the possibility of invasion of Australia by the Japanese, and the advisability of reinforcing Darwin and Port Moresby, Colvin said that if Japan should come into the war and the United States should not, there would be no point in holding Darwin, and the naval oil supplies there should be drained in such a contingency.

⁵ General of Army George C. Marshall. Chief of Staff, US Army, 1939-45; Ambassador to China 1945-47; US Secretary of State 1947-49. B. 31 Dec 1880.

⁶ Morison, pp. 43-4.

⁷ From documents in the German Naval Archives.

The defence of the northern part of Australia hinged on a battle fleet based at Singapore. If such were not possible, the situation became radically changed.

This was a plain statement of fact. As protection against full scale invasion, reliance was placed on Britain's ability to exercise control of the wider seas, and Singapore was the key to such control in the Western Pacific. Australia's own defence measures had been the continual development of an effective policy the first objective of which had been laid down by the Government's advisers as the completion of defence against a minor scale of attack. To achieve this a program for the expenditure of £43,000,000 had been approved some time before the war, and had been expanded to greater dimensions after Munich. "The present position was that the navy had in commission all the ships it could obtain or build; the strength of the army for local defence was being increased to 250,000 men; the air program was based on the early completion of the Salmond⁸ Scheme plus our contribution to the Empire Air Scheme. In regard to munitions, the Director-General had been informed that the sky is the limit and time is the essence of the contract."

The outcome of the meeting was that a cable was sent to the British Government stating that Australia was concerned about the report on the New Hebrides and New Caledonia, and requesting urgent advice on two main alternatives, (1) that the United States might exercise the same deterrent effect as in the case of the Netherlands East Indies; (2) that Australia might take action to forestall Japan by occupation with her own forces. "However, this might furnish a precedent to Japan for action in the N.E.I. We also realise that Japanese sea power could render impossible the maintenance of such forces. On the other hand, it is necessary to weigh whether Japan would risk war with the Empire and U.S.A. over these islands."

The British Government, replying in a series of messages a few days later, said that the United States Government could not then go beyond the declaration made in connection with the Netherlands East Indies, but that better results might be obtained from immediate American diplomatic approaches in Tokyo. It was agreed that occupation of the islands by Australian forces would provide Japan with a dangerous pretext for action against the Netherlands East Indies. In general, with her limited resources, Britain could not attempt to occupy French overseas territories, but in some cases her control of sea communications should enable her to deny the resources of those territories to the enemy. "We hope it may be possible to stimulate continued resistance on the part of the French Colonial Empire forces."

The Australian War Cabinet agreed with this attitude and decided, on the 25th June, that discussions with the French authorities in the islands

⁸ Marshal of RAF Sir John Salmond, GCB, CMG, CVO, DSO. Chief of Air Staff 1930-33; Director of Armament Production and D-G Flying Control and Air Sea Rescue 1939-45. B. 17 Jul 1881.

should be on a basis of trade relations in which the Commonwealth would offer to facilitate shipping from Australia to the islands and help in the solution of economic problems and the maintenance of stability. In the meantime, the French Resident Commissioner in the New Hebrides—M. Sautot—in close consultation with his British colleague—Mr R. D. Blandy—declared for de Gaulle, and on the 26th June the local elective council of New Caledonia, supported by the majority of the French population—though not by some among the wealthier merchants, officials, and military officers—passed a resolution affirming the colony's determination to continue the struggle against Germany. In July Mr B. C. Ballard, a solicitor who represented Australian interests in the New Hebrides, was appointed Australia's representative in New Caledonia. The Governor, M. Pelicier, responded favourably to Australian advances, and expressed his readiness to discuss all relevant questions with Ballard. There, for the moment, matters rested.

Before then, however, the British Government—in a telegram of the 28th June—told the Commonwealth that it was now not possible to divert naval forces from the Mediterranean to the Far East owing to the loss of the French Fleet, and that it was therefore desirable to reinforce Malaya with military and air strength. It had for some time been obvious that, if Britain intended to remain in the Mediterranean, she would be unable to send a fleet to Singapore. Nevertheless the statement of the obvious at this juncture, when the only certainty in the Pacific was the presence of a powerful and increasingly menacing potential enemy, was not a pleasant one for the Australian and New Zealand people. The situation was, however, capable of a measure of control. During the following weeks, in a number of exchanges between the respective British governments, a calm appreciation was made, and a more or less elastic policy evolved to meet the demands of a world wide strategy. Its Pacific partners were shortly told by the British Government that the decision regarding a fleet at Singapore was not the final word. In certain contingencies a fleet would be sent. In the meantime, in a situation fraught with dangers and weighted with factors of uncertainty, reliance upon control of sea communications as the basis of Empire defence, in whole or in territorial part, remained; and Australia, though denuded to the limit of naval forces for the protection of trade in her own waters or for defence against minor raids on her territories, made no demands for the return from overseas of her ships employed in Admiralty dispositions.

Fundamental to Empire defence was Britain's ability to resist invasion of the homeland and maintain her own overseas communications. If she could do that, though her naval strength was thinly stretched, it was growing rapidly, and even at its existing standard it was possible for her to ease the strain in one area to meet urgent and vital demands in another if necessity arose. To a degree the imminence of danger from Japan could be estimated, and regulated by diplomatic action. Among the uncertain factors entering into an assessment of the hazards in the Pacific was the attitude likely to be adopted by the United States and the Netherlands

East Indies in the face of Japanese aggression. It was an attitude likely to be determined largely by the success or otherwise of British defence in the immediate future.

In his message of the 16th June, on the eve of the capitulation of France, Mr Churchill told the Dominions Prime Ministers of the "solid reasons" underlying the belief that the British Islands could be defended successfully; and that, even if beaten down there, the fleets would be sent overseas to protect the Empire and enable it to continue the war and the blockade. The events of the succeeding weeks justified the confidence he expressed, and on the 11th August he gave the Australian and New Zealand Governments a comprehensive appreciation of the war situation, and an outline of British strategy based on the growing conviction that Britain herself would successfully resist invasion, and that developments overseas could be met, and to an extent directed, by weighing events from day to day and using available—and mounting—resources to the utmost.

With Great Britain secure, this strategy aimed at defeating Italy in the Mediterranean, holding Egypt and the Middle East, and preventing a German break out from Europe to the southward or eastward. In the Pacific, attempts to avoid war with Japan were being made "both by conceding on points where the Japanese military clique can perhaps force a rupture, and by standing up where the ground is less dangerous". If, however, Japan should declare war, her first objective outside the Yellow Sea probably would be the Netherlands East Indies. Though the United States had expressed the serious view she would take of an attack on the East Indies, she had given no undertaking of support to Britain in such an event, but "her main fleet in the Pacific must be a grave pre-occupation to the Japanese Admiralty". Britain would defend Singapore, and base on Ceylon a battle cruiser and fast aircraft carrier which, with all the New Zealand and Australian cruisers and destroyers—which would be returned to eastern waters—would act as a powerful deterrent upon hostile raiding cruisers.

We hope to maintain ourselves in Egypt and to keep the Eastern Fleet at Alexandria during the first phase of an Anglo-Japanese war, should that occur. . . . If however, contrary to prudence and self-interest, Japan set about invading Australia or New Zealand on a large scale, I have the explicit authority of the Cabinet to assure you that we should then cut our losses in the Mediterranean and sacrifice every interest, except only the defence and feeding of this Island, on which all depends, and would proceed in good time to your aid with a fleet able to give battle to any Japanese force which could be placed in Australian waters, and able to parry any invading force, or certainly cut its communications with Japan.

The foregoing message from Churchill was a foreword to a long appreciation of the Far Eastern situation by the British Chiefs of Staff, which was sent to the Dominion Governments the following day, the 12th August. Pointing out that the territorial integrity of Australia, New Zealand, and the Far Eastern colonies depended primarily on the control of sea communications, it stated that the foundation of strategy remained to base

on Singapore a fleet strong enough to provide cover to communications in the Indian Ocean and South-West Pacific, and to frustrate Japanese expeditions against British territories—but that until Germany and Italy could be defeated or their naval strength drastically reduced, the defence of the Far East must be attempted with an inadequate fleet. In the absence of a fleet the object would be to restrict damage to British interests and retain a footing whence the position could be retrieved when forces became available.⁹

The British Government recognised the untenable position in North China and decided to withdraw the garrisons from Peking, Tientsin, and Shanghai. These withdrawals, together with the closing of the Burma Road, had been demanded by the Japanese in June; and in accord with the policy of conceding on points where a rupture might be forced—and in deference also to Australian representations—these demands were met. Britain closed the Burma Road for three months on the 18th July, Churchill, in his message of the 11th August, telling the Australian and New Zealand Governments: "In adopting against the grain a yielding policy towards Japanese threats we have always in mind your interests and safety." Hong Kong, as a British colony, would be defended as long as possible, recognising the inability to reinforce or relieve it. Singapore would be defended, and it was believed it could be held by military and air forces until a fleet could be provided. It was considered that an attack on Singapore would probably be made by an up country landing and a southward advance rather than by direct attack on the island from the sea; and it was recognised that Japanese penetration of Indo-China or Thailand (Siam) would facilitate this approach and enable the enemy to establish shore-based aircraft within range of Penang, Singapore, the Malacca Strait and Rangoon; and make the defence of Burma and Malaya more difficult. Such penetration would not, however, seriously endanger vital British sea communications, so that, under existing conditions, Britain did not consider Japanese moves in Indo-China or Thailand a justification for declaring war.

Vital to the entire British defence system, second in importance only to "the integrity of Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore", were the Netherlands East Indies. The loss of these to the Japanese would seriously imperil the security of Indian Ocean communications, close the seas to the north of the Malay Archipelago, provide the Japanese with a base for an attack on Singapore, and secure oil and other raw materials to the enemy.

In the absence of a capital ship fleet we are unable to secure our vital interests in the Far East. The problem is to make the best dispositions possible to secure the most important of these interests without the cover which capital ships could provide. If in addition to the defence of Malaya we could deny to the Japanese the establishment of bases in the N.E.I., and if the movement of their naval forces

⁹ Comparative naval strengths in the Pacific at this time were: British—one 8-in cruiser, two modern 6-in and four old 6-in cruisers, six AMC's, five old destroyers, three A/S escort vessels, eight MTB's. Dutch forces in the NEI were: two cruisers, seven destroyers, sixteen submarines. Japanese naval forces available for "new ventures" were: ten battleships, three to seven aircraft carriers, and the appropriate cruiser and destroyer forces.

through the line of these islands could be impeded, the security of our interests would be considerably improved. We should aim therefore to secure the full military cooperation of the Dutch. In the absence of such cooperation we should concentrate on the defence of Malaya.

An estimate was given of the land and air forces needed to defend Malaya, Burma, Borneo, and adjacent islands, and to afford protection to the Indian Ocean routes in focal areas—both with and without Dutch cooperation—and the whole appreciation was based on the important assumptions that: (1) Britain would, for the time being, have to retain a fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean; (2) Reliance could be placed on a measure of economic and material support from the United States, but that America's active cooperation could not be anticipated; (3) Britain would go to war with Japan if she attacked the Netherlands East Indies and provided the Dutch resisted.

On this last point the views of the Dominions were sought, the British Government remarking that it appreciated the "strategic disadvantages of failure to take up a Japanese challenge, and the point for examination is whether our limited resources justify action in the event of Japan attacking the N.E.I. Also what would be the consequences of failure so to do."

The Australian Chiefs of Staff were in general agreement with the United Kingdom appreciation, and told the Commonwealth Government of their conclusions that Churchill's assurance regarding sending a fleet to Singapore was of such importance that Australia should endeavour to the utmost to cooperate in the defence of that area, which strategically now became of greater ultimate importance to her than the Middle East. They expressed the view that cooperation with the Dutch in the defence of the East Indies was of great consequence and should be afforded unless some weighty factor ruled otherwise; and that staff talks with the Dutch should be instituted "as soon as our forces are adequate". The Chiefs of Staff reaffirmed the view expressed in their report of 27th May 1939 (see Chapter 1) that a medium scale of attack, or even invasion of Australia, should be envisaged, instead of the minor scale of attack considered probable by the United Kingdom appreciation. They concluded that Australia could send no further naval or air forces to Singapore in the existing circumstances.

In a telegram of the 29th August, the Australian Government thanked the British Government for "assurances regarding naval dispositions that will be made", and expressed its willingness to send troops to Malaya—air force detachments had already left Australia for there in the transports *Orontes* (20,097 tons) and *Strathallan* (23,722 tons) in July and August. As the naval forces remaining in Australian waters were the minimum required for trade protection against possible surface raiders, no direct Australian naval support could be given at Singapore until a British fleet was sent there. The Australian Government considered that should Japan become established in the Netherlands East Indies "Singapore would be partially neutralised and the strategic position such that Australia would almost inevitably find herself at war with Japan". For the present, however,

it was considered that no unilateral obligation should be undertaken, but that any Japanese aggression should be viewed realistically in the light of the contemporaneous military position. "Suggest views of Empire should be put to U.S.A. with suggestion adoption similar realistic attitude if contingency arises."

As to the other Dominion partners, South Africa considered that however precarious the position in the Far East, diplomacy was the only weapon there for the time being, and it was desirable "for the moment" to concentrate forces on vital British and Mediterranean fronts. British and Dutch interests in the Far East would have to be joint to be effective. New Zealand believed that the problem could not be considered solely or even primarily as a military one, and that the political aspects were even more important. "Our honour and reputation for fair dealing are among the most valuable attributes of the British Commonwealth, so valuable that without them our cause might not prevail"; and the Dominion Government's views were summarised: (a) we are bound both by honour and interest to act with all possible vigour in case of Japanese aggression against the N.E.I.; (b) we should accept and so far as possible prepare against our present disadvantageous position vis-à-vis Japan; (c) the Dutch should be advised of our attitude and urged to resist Japan; (d) the Dutch should be advised of our difficulties but that steps were already under way to overcome our military limitations; (e) the Dutch should be advised of the obvious result of failure to concert plans. The above policy should be outlined to the U.S.A. Government. Canada, as she had done previously, replied that the matter was outside her field, and she had no views to express.

The foundation of a common policy between Britain, Australia and New Zealand was laid by this exchange of views, and the way paved for later talks with the Dutch and the Americans. In the meantime, pointers were not wanting to suggest the trend of future events. On the 9th July the Admiralty told the Naval Board that the Dutch were laying defensive minefields in the Netherlands East Indies; and on the 18th Australian Naval Intelligence recorded fully confirmed reports of abnormal Japanese transactions in the attempted purchase of up to one million barrels of aviation petrol for delivery by the 1st September. It was during July, also, that the first flight of what was to become an increasing flow of refugees from Asia and the Asian islands left the Philippines. They sailed from Manila in four Dutch liners—*Johan de Witt*, *Christiaan Huygens*, *Indrapoera*, and *Slamat*¹—and reached Australia in August. The three last-named vessels then formed part of A.I.F. Convoy US.5, which left Australia for the Middle East the following month.

In Japan, as a result of overwhelming anti-British and anti-American feeling in the army, the moderately-inclined Yonai cabinet was forced to resign on the 16th July and was succeeded by that of Prince Konoye, with General Hideki Tojo—a prominent militarist—as Minister of War, and the pro-German Yosuke Matsuoka as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The

¹ Of 10,474, 16,287, 10,825 and 11,636 tons respectively.

new government had the declared policy—said to be in line with the Japanese Navy's wishes—of the ending of the war in China, an understanding with Soviet Russia, orientation to the south, and independence from America. For the time being—according to information available after the war—the navy restrained the aggressive designs of the army. The navy realised that after supplies of oil from America ceased, they would have to be obtained elsewhere, and desired to procure them from the Netherlands East Indies by peaceful means, resorting to force only if such means failed. Penetration and pressure continued, however, and on the 30th August the French Vichy Government consented to a Japanese military occupation of northern Indo-China and the construction of air-fields there—thus establishing one of the conditions favourable to an attack on Malaya foreseen by the British Chiefs of Staff.

On the 19th September von Ribbentrop called on Italian Foreign Minister Ciano in Rome with "a surprise in his bag", the text of a military alliance with Japan, to be signed within the next few days. Mussolini was in complete agreement with the plan. "One must bear in mind," he explained, "that the Americans are very much afraid of Japan and of her fleet in particular since the American fleet, while being qualitatively large, must be considered an amateur organisation like the English army."² The pact—between Germany, Italy, and Japan—was signed at Berlin on the 27th September. By it, Germany, Italy and Japan recognised and respected each other's leadership in establishing a "new order" in Europe and the Far East respectively, and agreed to cooperate on that basis and assist one another economically, politically and militarily in the case "of an attack by a Power not at present involved in the European war or the Sino-Japanese conflict". The agreement was not to affect the political status existing between the Soviet Union and the three parties to it. The pact was signed—recorded Ciano in his *Diary*—"more or less like that of the Pact of Steel. But the atmosphere is cooler. Even the Berlin street crowd, a comparatively small one composed mostly of school children, cheers with regularity but without conviction." The signing of the pact determined Britain's relations with Japan. On the 8th October the Admiralty instructed the Commander-in-Chief, China, to withdraw from Wei-Hai-Wei—where a base had been leased from China under terms which expired on the 30th September, and which the Japanese puppet Government at Nanking refused to recognise or renew—and on the same day Mr Churchill announced that the Burma Road would be reopened on the 18th of the month. On the 19th October Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham³ was appointed Commander-in-Chief, responsible to the British Chiefs of Staff, of all British land and air forces in Malaya, Burma and Hong Kong. And from the 22nd to the 31st October a conference of representatives of Great Britain, Australia, Burma, India, New Zealand, the British East Indies and Malaya—with a United States

² *Ciano Diplomatic Papers* (1949), p. 392.

³ Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, GCVO, KCB, CMG, DSO, AFC, IG RAF 1935-36; Governor of Kenya 1937-39; C-in-C Far East 1940-41. B. 18 Sep 1878. Died 20 Oct 1953.

naval representative attending unofficially as an observer—was held at Singapore with the main object of making the best dispositions possible to ensure the defence of the Far East without the cover which a capital ship force could provide.

II

While these developments were going forward, preparations for local defence continued on the basis that the outlying defences—to which Australia was already contributing or had agreed to contribute—were the Middle East and Malaya, and the ocean communications; and that despite the present absence of a fleet from Singapore, Australia was not inevitably open to invasion. The garrisons of all three Services at Darwin, Thursday Island and Papua were slowly built up, and in June 1940 the coastal steamers *Zealandia* (6,683 tons) and *Orungal* (5,826 tons) were requisitioned as transports and employed on this work;⁴ and on the 1st August Papua and the mandated territory of New Guinea were constituted a new Australian military district. The transport of troops to the Middle East from the Commonwealth and New Zealand proceeded, and between July and December 1940, six convoys, comprising twenty-two transports carrying a total of approximately 49,000 troops, sailed from south-eastern Australia.⁵ The escorting of these convoys from eastern Australia to Colombo and Bombay was done by the R.A.N.

It will be remembered that at the end of June 1940 *Canberra* had sailed from Fremantle for service with the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic. She arrived at Capetown escorting the troopship *Strathmore* on the 11th July, and for the rest of the month was on patrol and escort duties on the South Atlantic Station. On the 4th August she sailed from Simonstown for Australia for attention to defects in a propeller tail shaft, and spent the second half of August in Sydney undergoing repairs and refit. On the 30th August she sailed from Sydney and escorted Convoy US.4 to Colombo. Thereafter, for the rest of the year, a regular escort routine of the US convoys was carried out by *Perth* and *Canberra*; with *Perth*—wearing the flag of the Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron—escorting from Sydney to Fremantle, or beyond to the vicinity of the Cocos Islands; and *Canberra* then taking over and escorting to Colombo and Bombay, whence onward escort was provided by cruisers of the East Indies Station. In each case the two Australian cruisers, having handed over the convoys to their on-taking escorts, returned to Sydney and the eastern Indian Ocean respectively to pick up the next convoy. This routine continued until November, when *Perth* went overseas to replace *Sydney* in Admiralty dispositions, and escorted convoy US.7 to the Red Sea on her way to the Mediterranean. The final convoy of the year—US.8, which

⁴ *Orungal's* career as a troopship, because of her unsuitability, was short. She was released for return to trade in Aug 1940, and on 21 Nov went ashore at Barwon Heads, Victoria. She later caught fire while ashore and became a total loss.

⁵ Convoys US.4 (*Mauretania*, *Empress of Japan*, *Orcades*, *Aquitania*); US.5 (*Christiaan Huygens*, *Indrapoera*, *Slamat*, *Nieuw Holland*); US.5a (*Nieuw Zeeland*, *Johan de Witt*); US.6 (*Queen Mary*, *Aquitania*, *Mauretania*); US.7 (*Batory*, *Orion*, *Strathmore*, *Stratheden*); US.8 (*Queen Mary*, *Aquitania*, *Mauretania*, *Awatea*, *Dominion Monarch*). Of the total numbers carried, approximately 39,800 were Australians, including 500 RAN and 50 RAAF. The balance were New Zealanders.

sailed from Bass Strait on the 30th December—was escorted from Sydney to Colombo by *Canberra*. A routine was also established with the large transports—*Queen Mary*, *Aquitania*, and *Mauretania*—which were regularly employed in the US convoys, and which trans-shipped their troops at Colombo or Bombay for onward passage to the Middle East and returned independently to Australia for subsequent convoys.

The recurring absence of *Perth* from eastern Australian waters, and the presence of *Canberra* in the eastern Indian Ocean during these convoy escort operations, led to some readjustment of the small force remaining on the Australia Station. Throughout July *Adelaide* remained as Western Force cruiser based on Fremantle, but on the 6th August she sailed for Sydney for refit and remained in the east until the end of the year. Throughout most of August and until the middle of October *Manoora*, based on Fremantle, patrolled and escorted in Western waters, and spent the rest of the year on the same duties on the north coast between Darwin, Thursday Island, and Port Moresby. Of the sloops which remained on the Australia Station at the 30th June 1940, *Yarra* went overseas two months later to join the Red Sea Force, but her place in the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla was taken by the newly-completed *Warrego*, which commissioned at Sydney on the 22nd August under Commander Wheatley.⁶ The auxiliary minesweeping groups based on the various ports, which at the 30th June 1940 comprised twelve ships in five groups at Sydney, Melbourne, Fremantle, Brisbane, and Newcastle, were increased by a further seven vessels by the end of the year, and by the establishment of a group—70—at Darwin. Six of these ships were trawlers and small coasters requisitioned from trade, but the seventh—HMAS *Bathurst*,⁷ which commissioned on the 6th December under Lieut-Commander Bunyan⁸—was the first of the corvettes to be completed under the Government's shipbuilding program.⁹ The auxiliary groups carried out intensive training, separately and in conjunction with the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla, and routine sweeps of searched channels; and were in addition increasingly called upon to carry out searching sweeps as a result of reports of suspicious actions by ships in coastal waters, and of objects sighted. A typical report was that of the 17th August 1940, when the coastal steamer *Period* (2,791 tons) sighted "three spherical objects, possibly mines", floating off Botany Bay. The port of Sydney was temporarily closed, ships at sea were ordered to keep twenty-five miles from the position of the sighting, and *Doomba* and *Orara* of the 20th Flotilla, with six auxiliary sweepers, searched without result for the "mines", which

⁶ Capt R. V. Wheatley, OBE; RAN. (HMAS *Australia*, 1918.) OIC Hydro Branch 1939; Comd HMAS *Warrego* and SO 20th MS Flotilla 1940-42; NOIC Townsville 1942-44; D/NOIC New Guinea 1944-45; Comd HMAS *Swan* and Capt Mine Clearance 1945. B. Adelaide, 19 Dec 1900.

⁷ HMAS *Bathurst*, corvette (1940), 733 tons, one 4-in gun, 16 kts.

⁸ Cdr A. V. Bunyan, DSC, RD; RANR(S). Comd HMAS's *Swan* 1940 and 1943-44, *Bathurst* 1940-42, *Manoora* 1943, *Kanimbla* 1944-45. Of St Kilda, Vic; b. Leith, Scotland, 17 Feb 1902.

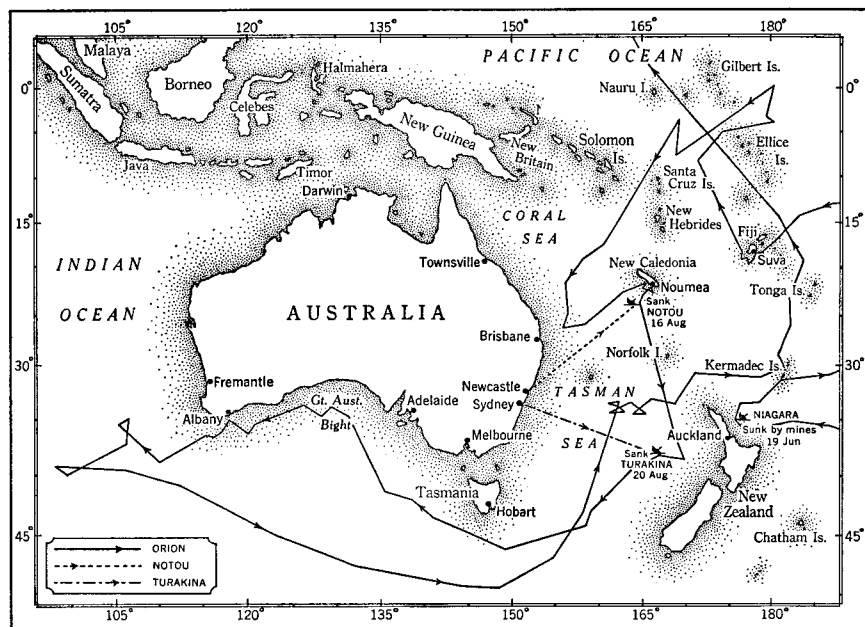
⁹ The six additional auxiliary minesweepers requisitioned from trade were: Group 50 (Sydney) HMA Ships *Samuel Benbow* (122 tons), 5 Sep 1940; Group 54 (Melbourne) *Durraween* (271 tons), 29 Jul 1940; Group 66 (Fremantle) *Alfie Cam* (282 tons), 28 Jul 1940; *Gunbar* (481 tons), 18 Dec 1940; Group 70 (Darwin) *Tolga* (418 tons), 30 Dec 1940; Group 74 (Brisbane) *Goonambee* (222 tons), 9 Aug 1940. The dates are those of commissioning.

were subsequently assumed to have been fishermen's buoys. As was learned later, the first enemy mines in Australian waters in the war of 1939-45 were not laid until October 1940 (though four dummy mines were laid off Albany in September). Mines were, however, still being swept up in the Hauraki Gulf, New Zealand; and a few days after the *Period* alarm came evidence of the presence of an enemy raider in the Tasman Sea.

In August 1940 the French steamer *Notou* (2,489 tons) sailed from Newcastle, New South Wales, bound for Noumea. She was due at the New Caledonian port on the 17th of the month, but failed to arrive. Soon after 5 p.m. Eastern Australian time on the 20th, wireless signals from the British steamer *Turakina* (8,706 tons), which had sailed from Sydney bound for Wellington, New Zealand, reported that she was being shelled by a raider approximately 260 miles north-west of Cape Farewell, the northernmost point of the South Island of New Zealand. There followed a brief period in which *Turakina* broadcast her distress signal several times, then silence. At this time preparations for the sailing of Convoy US.4—*Mauretania*, *Empress of Japan*, and *Orcades* from New Zealand, and *Aquitania* from Sydney—were under way. *Achilles*, which was to escort the New Zealand transports to Australia, was in Wellington. In Sydney were *Canberra* and *Adelaide*—both refitting—and *Perth* who, it had been arranged, would provide supporting cover to *Achilles* and her convoy while crossing the Tasman. On receipt of *Turakina's* broadcast *Achilles*—around 9 p.m.—sailed from Wellington to the position of the attack, and about the same time *Perth* left Sydney for a covering position in mid-Tasman. Sailings between Australia and New Zealand were suspended, and air searches were carried out from Australia, New Zealand, the Solomons and Rabaul, but without result. Nothing further was heard from *Turakina*, nor did *Notou* reply to wireless signals calling her. Sailings across the Tasman were resumed on the 22nd August, and fruitless air searches continued for a further two days. The first tangible evidence of the fate of the two ships was a gangway from *Notou* found on a beach near Noumea in October 1940, and wreckage from *Turakina* washed ashore on the west coast of New Zealand's north island the following month.

Thirteen days after her attack on *Turakina*, however, the raider—subsequently known to be the German *Orion*, which had laid the mines in Hauraki Gulf in June—was sighted by an aircraft of the R.A.A.F. 130 miles south of Albany, Western Australia. Convoy US.4, escorted by *Canberra*, was at this time approaching the western Bight on its passage to Fremantle, and on the 3rd September an aircraft from Albany taking part in the covering searches in the convoy's track, sighted an unidentified ship "of about 7,000 tons". The aircraft twice circled the raider, but could not identify her because of poor visibility; and later searches failed to sight her, though aircraft motors were heard from the ship while she was hidden in a rain squall. Her identity as being probably that of the Tasman raider was, however, correctly inferred by the Naval Staff, and Colvin so informed the War Cabinet on the 10th September.

As was later learned, this approach to the Australian coast was one of a number made by *Orion* between August and November 1940. After minelaying in New Zealand and capturing the Norwegian vessel *Tropic Sea* (5,781 tons) in May, she spent some days patrolling the Pacific routes to the north-east of New Zealand without finding a victim. On the 10th August in the South Coral Sea she sighted the British Phosphate Commission steamer *Triona* (4,413 tons), but abandoned the chase "because of insufficient superiority in speed and the rapid approach of darkness". *Orion's* Captain—Kurt Weyher—thought *Triona* would report his presence on reaching port, but she did not do so. Meanwhile, from Australian broadcasts, the raider received a partial picture of the Commonwealth's



seaward defences, it being assumed from talks by Air Force representatives that Australian waters were controlled by the R.A.A.F., and were patrolled by aircraft to a depth of 100 miles. On the 11th August *Orion* was 120 miles north-east of Brisbane, when she turned to patrol the Australia-New Caledonia route. Two days later she intercepted a wireless message from the R.A.N. to an American steamer asking if anything had been seen of a patrol aircraft missing off Brisbane. From the position given, Weyher learned that patrols were being carried out up to 150 miles to seaward: "thus the decision to remain in the vicinity of Brisbane only for a brief lapse of time proved to be justified." From the 14th to the 16th August *Orion* cruised off Noumea harbour, and her aircraft, during a reconnaissance flight over the town, saw public gatherings in the

streets and squares which—as was inferred from wireless transmissions—were connected with pro-de Gaulle and anti-Vichy activities, while it was also learned that a ship carrying a British Resident was expected.

On the 16th August *Orion* intercepted and sank *Notou* south-west of Noumea; and four days later met and sank *Turakina*. The British ship, armed with one 4.7-inch gun, put up a brave fight. She was finally put out of action, burning fiercely, and was sunk by torpedoes. Thirty-six of her company—including her captain¹—were killed, and twenty-one survivors picked up by the raider. Following this action *Orion* made to the south-west and passed well south of Tasmania and up into the Australian Bight, crossing the shipping lanes many times without making any sightings. Within sight of Eclipse Island on the night of the 2nd September she laid four dummy mines off Albany with the object of diverting shipping and, after being sighted by aircraft on the following morning, she made off to the south-west and patrolled the Cape-Australia route for a while before returning eastward well south of Australia and Tasmania, and up through the Tasman Sea to the Marshall Islands to refuel. She reached there on the 10th October without having made any more victims.

III

The ferment which *Orion's* aircraft observed in the streets and squares of Noumea was at this time causing concern to the British and Australian Governments. Despite the resolution of the elective council of New Caledonia of the 26th June, affirming the decision to continue the fight against Germany, pro-Vichy elements in the island appeared to be gaining ground. The Governor—M. Pelicier—who had apparently been trying to balance on a precarious foothold in each camp, telegraphed on the 29th July to M. Sautot in the New Hebrides stating that the Vichy Government desired the names of all French officials there rallying to the de Gaulle movement; and a few days later the Vichy Minister for the Colonies sent out an instruction to the effect that a French colony which continued to fight was guilty of treason.

Loyalties in the French Far East were divided. Indo-China was definitely pro-Vichy, and the New Hebrides as definitely pro-de Gaulle, to whose cause Tahiti—after a movement in his favour had temporarily been suppressed—also adhered. The strength and organisation of de Gaulle supporters in New Caledonia were not known with any certainty outside that island. On the 15th August, after some confusion and delay on the part of the British Government, M. Sautot—who had in the meantime been confirmed as French Resident Commissioner in the New Hebrides by de Gaulle—received assurances of full British support for himself and all concerned in the de Gaulle movement there. When confirming his appointment de Gaulle asked M. Sautot to consider going to New Caledonia as Governor, and to try and rally that colony to the Free French movement—a course which was then impracticable since Sautot was

¹ Capt J. B. Laird. Master of *Turakina* 1930-40. Of Wellington, NZ, and Glasgow; b. Scotland 1893. Killed in action 20 Aug 1940.

unaware of the identity of the de Gaullists in New Caledonia and had no secret means of contact with the island. A move to get information at first hand was made at the end of August when the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, Sir Harry Luke,² who had reached the New Hebrides on the 25th to study the whole position, continued on to New Caledonia accompanied by the British Resident Commissioner, Mr Blandy, to confer with Pelicier.

At this time the French Navy was represented in the South Pacific by the sloop *Dumont d'Urville*,³ whose commanding officer, Touissant de Quievrecourt, was an ardent Vichy supporter. On the 6th July *Dumont d'Urville*, which had been suppressing "autonomist movements" in Tahiti, sailed from Papeete for outlying islands after giving assurances that she would not leave the territorial waters of French Oceania without informing the British consul. Thereafter her whereabouts remained uncertain to the British until Sir Harry Luke and Mr Blandy arrived in Noumea on the 30th August and found her there. They learnt also that, on the day they arrived, Pelicier had been replaced as Governor by Colonel Denis, the military commandant—whose appointment had been telegraphed by the Vichy Government the previous night—so that "99 per cent of the cards were still in the hands of the Vichy authorities at Noumea", though the French population of 17,000 was overwhelmingly pro-de Gaulle and pro-Ally. The visitors discovered that no de Gaulle organisation existed; that no cooperation was to be expected from the Vichy authorities in Noumea who were, in fact, then "seriously treating with Japan with a view to protection"; that a considerable proportion of the population was ripe for a change of régime but lacked a leader; and that *Dumont d'Urville* was there to suppress any such movement.⁴

Sir Harry Luke and Blandy arrived back in the New Hebrides on the 3rd September, and there learned for the first time that a plan was in train to send Sautot to Noumea as Governor in H.M.A.S. *Adelaide*, which had left Sydney the previous day for Vila via Brisbane. The information was contained in telegrams from the Australian Prime Minister and the Naval Board, both of which showed faulty appreciation of the situation in New Caledonia, and of that of Sautot, who was still unaware of what was expected of him.

Adelaide reached Vila at 7 a.m. on the 7th September. Her captain, Showers, had been told by the Naval Board that his principal objects were to convey Sautot to Noumea and, by the ship's presence there, possibly induce *Dumont d'Urville* to leave. Great care was to be taken to avoid any wrong impression that annexation was intended, and the pretext of the visit could be given as an operation in the search for the raider which attacked *Notou* and *Turakina*. "Your instructions do not include the use of force, at any rate at present."

² Sir Harry Luke, KCMG. (A/Cdr, RNVF, Syrian coast and Dardanelles 1914-16.) High Commissioner W Pacific 1938-42; Chief Rep of British Council in Caribbean 1943-46. B. London, Dec 1884.

³ *Dumont d'Urville*, French sloop (1932), 1,969 tons; three 5.4-in guns; 15.5 kts.

⁴ From "Quarterly Summary of Events for the History of the War", New Hebrides Condominium, by R. D. Blandy.

Before *Adelaide* reached Vila, however, and as a result of representations from Sir Harry Luke to the Australian and British Governments, the Naval Board told Showers that he was to await further orders at Vila. But on the day before *Adelaide's* arrival a ketch from Noumea reached Vila with a message that a de Gaulle committee had been formed in New Caledonia, and asking Sautot if he would consider becoming Governor, "to which end they were willing to use force". There followed some days of conferences and telegraphic exchanges with the interested authorities overseas, as the result of which it was decided that the de Gaulle committee in New Caledonia should stage a *coup de force* at 1 a.m. on the 19th September; that at 7 a.m. Sautot—who had meanwhile been appointed Governor by de Gaulle—should arrive off Noumea in the Norwegian tanker *Norden* escorted by *Adelaide*; and that, if the *coup de force* were successful, he should then land and assume his position as Governor. The operation was to be completely French in form and manner, and moral support only was to be given by *Adelaide*. A detailed plan, drawn up by Showers in consultation with Blandy, and approved by the Naval Board, allowed for the disembarkation of Sautot from *Norden* into an identified de Gaulle boat from the shore if the *coup de force* were successful, and the withdrawal of the expedition "using least possible degree of force", and the return of Sautot to Vila in *Adelaide*, in the event of its failure.

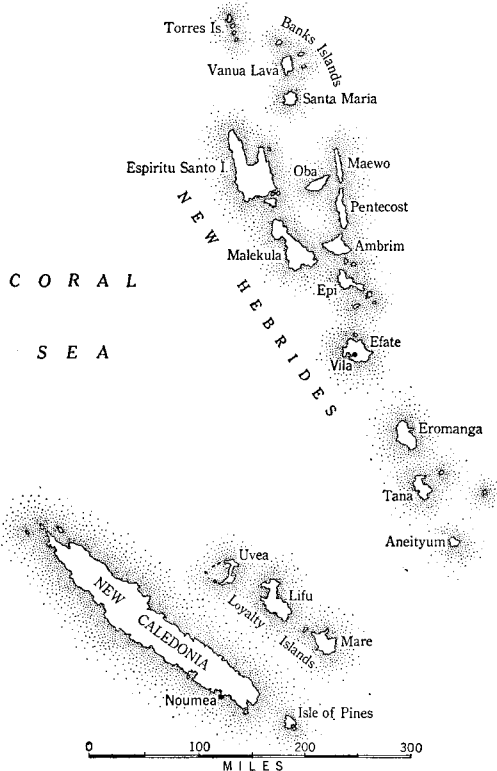
Adelaide, with *Norden* in company, left Vila in the evening of the 16th September, and shortly after 6 a.m. on the 19th approached Noumea with her company at action stations. First indications were that the de Gaullist *coup* had gone awry. There was no boat at the arranged rendezvous, which the two ships reached at 7.10 a.m., and Showers decided to close Noumea harbour. Shortly afterwards a boat from *Dumont d'Urville* hailed *Adelaide* and asked the reason of her presence. *Adelaide's* reply was to close *Norden* to prevent any possibility of the boat boarding that vessel. By 8.33 the town of Noumea was in full view from *Adelaide*, and *Dumont d'Urville* was sighted alongside with her guns trained fore and aft, while the shore signal station, though flying the de Gaulle flag superior to the Tricolour, signalled to *Adelaide* "You must not enter harbour".

It had been intended that, had all gone well and Sautot landed, *Norden* should have sailed at 9 a.m., but Showers decided to keep her pending the arrival of a boat seen approaching from the shore. It brought a message from the de Gaulle committee to say that Governor Denis, alarmed by the concentration in Noumea the previous day of de Gaullists, who were largely countrymen, had declared a state of siege; that one member of the committee had been arrested and the remainder had fled to the country (actually they had gone there to organise the farmers) and that the Vichy element—mainly through the agency of landing parties from *Dumont d'Urville*—were in control of the port and town and all roads to a distance of four miles beyond the town. Showers was told that *Adelaide* would probably be fired on by the forts if she approached Noumea.

This was gloomy news, but Showers, a steady type not easily tempted to impetuous action, considered that the report was probably some hours old and that the situation might change for the better, and decided to wait upon events until 4 p.m. In the meantime he took Sautot on board *Adelaide* and dispatched the tanker. A few minutes after 11 a.m. a boat flying the de Gaulle flag approached from Noumea giving the pre-arranged identification signal—the throwing overboard of empty kerosene tins at stated intervals. This boat brought members of the de Gaulle committee, and news that the Governor had bowed to public opinion, that the state of siege had been lifted and the *Dumont d'Urville* parties withdrawn to their ship, and that the de Gaullists were in control of the town. At 11.30 a.m. Sautot disembarked into the boat and proceeded ashore. He landed at 12.10 p.m. and was met with great enthusiasm by a large crowd at whose head he marched to Government House where, after "half an hour's somewhat unpleasant discussion", Denis agreed to hand over to him at 3 p.m.

The *coup de force* was thus successful through careful planning culminating in the opportune arrival of *Adelaide* and Sautot. When they arrived the Vichy authorities were still in control of the town and forts; military picquets blocked the roads and prevented members of the de Gaulle committee and bodies of armed farmers from entering Noumea; and the *Dumont d'Urville* was supporting the Governor. The sight of *Adelaide* and *Norden* in the offing at 7 a.m. doubtless influenced Pétainists, de Gaullists, and waverers at a crucial moment. It was subsequently learned that at 8 a.m., as *Adelaide* closed *Norden* to forestall the *Dumont d'Urville's* boat, Denis ordered one of the shore batteries to open fire on the cruiser. The sergeant in charge protested, and at 8.10 the order was cancelled.

Throughout the 19th September and the following night *Adelaide* patrolled off the harbour to give moral support to the de Gaullists ashore. It had been intended that she should remain only twenty-four hours, but



the instability of Sautot's position in the early stages of his governorship; the presence of *Dumont d'Urville*, whose captain remained obdurately dissident to the new administration; and news of the departure from Saigon on the 20th September of the Vichy sloop *Amiral Charner*⁵ bound for Noumea, kept the Australian cruiser there for nearly three weeks. During that period the Sautot administration foiled two counter-strokes; and by delicate handling in a series of exchanges of notes and conversations, backed by guarantees as to the treatment of Pétainists ashore and the provisioning and safe passage of his ship, Showers prevailed upon Touissant de Quievrecourt to sail *Dumont d'Urville* to Saigon, where *Amiral Charner* also returned. *Dumont d'Urville* left Noumea on the 25th September, some days before *Amiral Charner* could possibly have arrived there. From then on the position ashore stabilised, and on the 28th Showers told the Naval Board he was confident Sautot's government could handle any situation which might arise. *Adelaide* finally sailed on the 5th October and reached Sydney on the 8th. Three days later the French steamer *Pierre Loti* left Noumea for Australia with some 230 Pétainists, including Colonel Denis and military and civil officers, for onward passage to Indo-China.

The success of the Noumea operation concurrently with the failure of that at Dakar was largely due to adequate planning in cooperation with the de Gaullists on the spot. Without such planning it might well have proved another Dakar, but with more dangerous implications in view of the possibility of Japanese intervention backed by superior sea power. The part played by *Adelaide* and her ship's company—and especially by Showers—was considerable in bringing about the results achieved. "I was very heavily indebted," Blandy later wrote in his report to Sir Harry Luke, "to this officer [Showers] during the trying waiting period for his good advice, accurate summing up and perfect collaboration, which in great measure ensured the success of the operation and the stabilisation of the final position."⁶

IV

Throughout the second half of 1940, although the future actions of Japan and the reactions of the United States and the Netherlands East Indies were very uncertain, plans for a Pacific war which might involve the British and these other three, began to take nebulous shape. During September, preliminary Anglo-American staff talks were held in London, but made little practical headway owing to these uncertainties and to a divergence of opinion as to the importance of Singapore, which the Americans discounted. In any attempted planning at this stage the British were at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the United States. In October the American Secretary to the Navy, Colonel Knox, said that "the navy was prepared to defend any territory under the American flag". Roosevelt, in a speech

⁵ *Amiral Charner*, French sloop (1932), 1,969 tons, three 5.4-in guns, 15.5 kts.

⁶ For the political and diplomatic side of the New Caledonia affair, see Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1939-1941*, Chapter 6, in the Civil series of this history.

the same month during the Presidential election campaign, said "We shall not send the army or the navy or the air force to fight in foreign lands except in case of attack", without specifying attacker or attacked. Even Roosevelt knew no answer to the question whether the United States would consider a Japanese attack on British, Dutch or French Pacific possessions a *casus belli*. But it had been made clear to the American Government that Britain would immediately declare war upon Japan if she attacked the United States.⁷

The September talks in London, however, sowed the seed of unified naval command in the Pacific. In October the British Government suggested to the Australian that in the event of war involving Britain, the United States, and the Dutch, British and Dutch naval forces operating in the Far East and Pacific Ocean should be placed under United States command with the exception of purely local defence forces. This suggestion "was intended to apply to Australian and New Zealand forces as well as our own and is therefore submitted to concurrence of H.M. Governments in those Dominions". On the recommendation of Admiral Colvin, this suggestion was concurred in by the War Cabinet, with the reservation that local Australian defence forces, including those necessary for the protection of trade against a raider scale of attack, should remain under Australian control. During October, also, by agreement between the Australian and New Zealand Governments, a procedure under which the War Room at Melbourne would be the directing authority to coordinate operations of Australian and New Zealand naval forces against raiders in the Tasman was brought into force, and provision made for the interchange of operational intelligence.

Because of the uncertainties regarding their attitudes, the Dutch were not represented at the Singapore Conference in October, and the Americans sent a naval observer only. Australia and New Zealand sent service representatives, those of the R.A.N. being the Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff, Captain Burnett, and Lieut-Commander Oldham. Chairman of the Conference was Vice-Admiral Layton,⁸ Commander-in-Chief, China. Terms of reference, which had been received from the British Government, were: tactical appreciation of the situation in the Far East in the event of Japanese aggression, based on assumptions underlying the British Chiefs of Staff appreciation summarised in the telegram of the 12th August; review of defence requirements of India and Burma in the light of possible Japanese threat from Thailand; points for discussion with

⁷ "Supposing Japan attacked British, Dutch or French possessions, would the United States consider it a *casus belli*? Even President Roosevelt knew no answer to that question. . . . He could not be certain of obtaining a declaration of war from Congress on that issue, which would certainly have been interpreted as 'sending American boys to support tottering colonial empires'." S. E. Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol III (1948), p. 54.

"... if Japan attacked the United States without declaring war on us we should at once range ourselves at the side of the United States and declare war upon Japan. . . . A clear directive is required to all our Ambassadors in countries concerned." (Minute from British Prime Minister to Foreign Secretary, 4 Oct 1940.) W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol II (1949), pp. 599-600.

⁸ Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, GBE, KCB, KCMG, DSO; RN. Vice-Adm Cdg 1st Battle Sqn and Second I/c Home Fleet, 1939-40; C-in-C China 1940-41, Eastern Fleet 1941-42, Ceylon 1942-43, Portsmouth 1943-47. B. 20 Apr 1884.

N.E.I. and U.S. representatives in the event of staff conversations eventually materialising. At the request of the Australian delegation, supported by that of New Zealand, the terms of reference were widened to review generally the defensive position in the Far East, with a view to assessing the probable commitments and resources of the governments concerned in the event of war with Japan; this to be done on the basis that "the Dutch are probably our allies, but the United States of America is neutral at the outset".

The conclusions of the conference, the observations of the Australian delegation, and the views thereon of the Chiefs of Staff, were considered at a War Cabinet meeting on the 26th November, where "grave concern" was expressed at the serious position revealed in regard to the defence of Malaya and Singapore, "so vital to the security of Australia". The general conclusion reached by the Australian delegation was that in the absence of a main fleet in the Far East, the forces and equipment available for the defence of Malaya were totally inadequate to meet a major Japanese attack, and the first and immediate consideration must be to rectify that. The Chiefs of Staff emphasised to the Government that Australia "should strain all efforts and resources to cooperate in the actual defence of the area".

In the light of consideration of possible Japanese moves in the event of war, it was concluded that minimum naval forces—other than troop convoy escorts and excluding local defence forces, and assuming that adequate air forces were maintained in focal areas—required to safeguard essential communications in Australasian waters would be two 8-inch gun and one 6-inch gun cruisers in south-eastern Australia; two 6-inch gun cruisers in south-western Australia; and two 6-inch gun cruisers in New Zealand waters; with five destroyers for troop convoy escorts. These ships could be provided by the return of Australian and New Zealand forces serving overseas; but they would not suffice to provide protection for Darwin, nor for the Australia-New Zealand phosphate trade from Nauru and Ocean Island; and the three cruisers in the south-east Australia area would have to help to provide convoy escorts, the resulting reduction in trade protection being accepted. It was considered that cruiser escort would be sufficient for east-bound Pacific troop convoys or transports until clear of New Zealand focal areas, from whence security would be achieved by evasive routeing. Capital ship escort for troop convoys in the Indian Ocean would be required, and the provision of aircraft in focal areas. The establishment of bases at Suva, Port Moresby, and Darwin should be expedited, together with that of defences at Thursday Island, and Australia should help in making up deficiencies of anti-submarine and minesweeping vessels for local defence in New Zealand and Burma, using vessels building in Australia on Admiralty account. The War Cabinet noted the conclusions as to the minimum naval forces required in Australasian waters, and approved that all assistance possible should be given with anti-submarine and minesweeping vessels, and it was broadly on these lines that the naval situation, as it affected Australia, developed in the following months.

A disturbing feature of the conference was noted by Burnett in a minute of the 8th November addressed to Colvin. He remarked on a tendency on the part of the Far Eastern defence staffs at Singapore, very noticeable in the naval sphere, to a parochial attitude; they were "interested in any suggestions for making good their own local deficiencies but rather uninterested in Australian and New Zealand naval activities". The attitude of the civil administration also left much to be desired. They had always resented the establishment of a fortress there, and had never cooperated with the Services satisfactorily. The Malayan war outlook seemed half-hearted and the interests of "rubber and tin" more important than putting every ounce into the war effort. . . . "It is realised," wrote Burnett, "that these problems are not Australia's responsibility. On the other hand, the security of Singapore is of vital concern to us, and it is most disquieting to find a state of affairs there far removed from what was expected at the Empire's main naval base in the Far East." He added that the opinion was expressed that this was basically due to administration being from the United Kingdom, where local conditions were not fully appreciated and delays unavoidable. "Much greater decentralisation is essential. Perhaps the recent appointment of a Commander-in-Chief Far East is the first step in this direction." The need for a stronger Australian voice in Singapore was thus made evident, and something was achieved in the later exchange of visits by naval representatives. As an immediate result, there was some improvement in the transmission of operational intelligence from the Captain on the Intelligence Staff, Singapore, to Long, the D.N.I. at Melbourne; although, right up to the fall of Malaya, Australia never received all the intelligence available at Singapore, nor information of a reliable nature of the conditions existing in the area.

V

Events in the last three months of 1940 showed the need for adequate naval forces on the Australia Station where, in the Indian Ocean, in Australian coastal waters, and in the north-eastern area, German armed merchant cruisers were increasingly active and secured a number of victims. From information received after the war it was learned that there were at this time four German surface raiders on or near the Australia Station. In October *Orion* reached the Marshall Islands where she met the supply ship *Regensburg* (8,068 tons) from Japan, and refuelled. The two ships left the Marshalls on the 12th October and on the 14th—on passage to Lamutrik in the Carolines—sank the Norwegian *Ringwood* (7,203 tons). On the 18th October they reached Lamutrik and there met *Komet*,⁹ in company with the supply ship *Kulmerland* (7,363 tons). *Komet* had left Germany in July 1940 and reached the Pacific by the North-East Passage. At the time of the meeting at Lamutrik she had made no victims. *Atlantis*, which had left Germany in March and laid the mines off the South African coast, was responsible for the capture of *Tirranna* and the sinking of

⁹ *Komet*, German auxiliary cruiser (1937), 3,287 tons, six 5.9-in guns, four torp tubes, 250 mines, 19 kts; sunk by British destroyers off Cape de la Hague, 14 Oct 1942.

City of Bagdad and *Kemmendine* in June and July, and followed these successes with others in the Indian Ocean during the remainder of the year. In June 1940, *Penguin*¹ left Germany and, after sinking one ship in the Atlantic, rounded the Cape and entered the Indian Ocean in August. In a leisurely voyage across the Indian Ocean she captured one ship and sank four, and on the 7th October added to that list and captured the Norwegian tanker *Storstad* (8,998 tons), which was on passage from Borneo to Melbourne. A prize crew and mines were transferred to *Storstad* and the two ships proceeded in company to mine Australian coastal waters. During the night of 28th October *Penguin*, with her bridge officer plotting searchlights and navigation lights at Newcastle and Port Stephens, Norah Head, Barranjoey and Sydney, laid mines between Sydney and Newcastle. The last of four lays was completed at midnight, and shortly afterwards *Penguin* set course for Hobart and laid two fields off that port during the night of 31st October-1st November. Meanwhile *Storstad*, on the nights of 29th, 30th and 31st October, laid fields in Banks Strait, and off Wilson's Promontory and Cape Otway. A few nights later *Penguin* laid minefields in the Spencer Gulf off Adelaide. Both ships then made westward into the Indian Ocean.

The first intimation of this visit reached Navy Office in the early hours of 8th November, when the war signal station at Wilson's Promontory reported the sinking off South East Point of the steamer *Cambridge*.² Bound from Melbourne to Sydney, *Cambridge* was rounding South East Point about two-and-a-half miles off shore at 11 p.m. on the 7th, when an explosion occurred in the after-part of the ship. All lights failed, the vessel began to settle by the stern, and the master, Captain Angell,³ ordered abandon ship. Of the ship's company of fifty-eight, one man, the carpenter, was lost. The remainder, in three life-boats, approached the shore and reported the sinking by lamp to the war signal station.

At this time *Canberra* was in the Indian Ocean and *Perth* was off Western Australia. *Adelaide*, in Sydney, was ordered to sea to search for a possible minelayer. *Warrego* and *Swan*, at Nepean Bay, South Australia; *Orara* (Lieut-Commander Fyfe⁴) in the Bass Strait area; and the auxiliary sweeper *Durraween*⁵ in Port Phillip; were ordered to the scene of the sinking. Aircraft from Laverton, Victoria, and Richmond, New South Wales, searched from daylight on the 8th and the Naval Board broadcast to all merchant ships to avoid the area. *Orara* reached Wilson's Promontory at 9.20 a.m. on the 8th, took the *Cambridge* survivors from their boats—which she sank after trying to tow them in bad sea conditions—and landed the merchant seamen at Welshpool that evening. At 9.15 the following morning—by which time the searching aircraft had reported

¹ *Penguin*, German auxiliary cruiser (1936), 7,766 tons, six 5.9-in guns, four torp tubes, 250 mines, 18 kts; sunk by HMS *Cornwall*, NW area of Indian Ocean, 8 May 1941.

² *Cambridge*, British steamer (1916), 10,846 tons, Federal Steam Nav Co Ltd, London, 14 kts.

³ Capt A. J. Angell. Master of *Cambridge* 1940, *Cornwall* 1941-43, *Gloucester* 1944-48. Of Aldwick, Sussex, Eng.

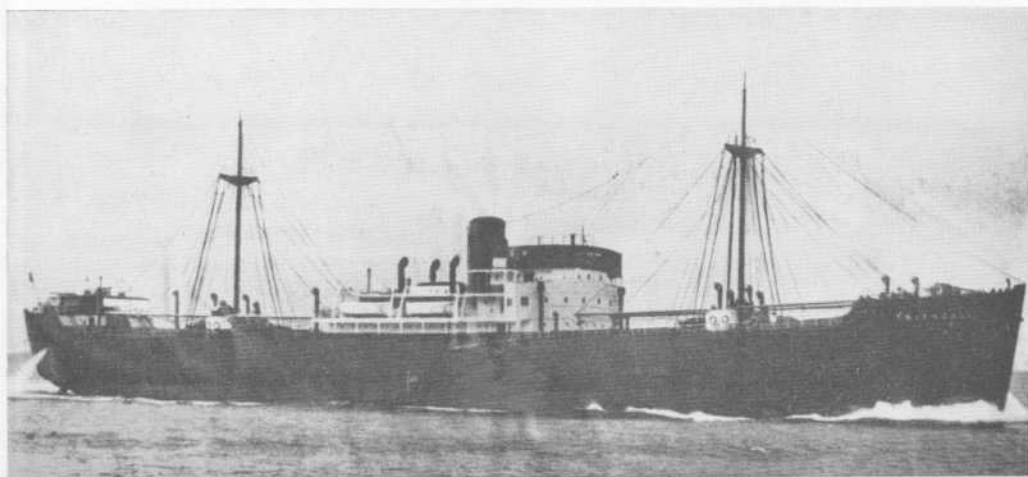
⁴ Lt-Cdr J. G. S. Fyfe, RANR(S). Comd HMAS's *Tambar* 1940, *Orara* 1940-43; Recruiting Officer, Port Melbourne, 1943-46. Of Elwood, Vic; b. Glasgow, Scotland, 4 Jun 1901.

⁵ HMAS *Durraween*, auxiliary minesweeper (1919), 271 tons.



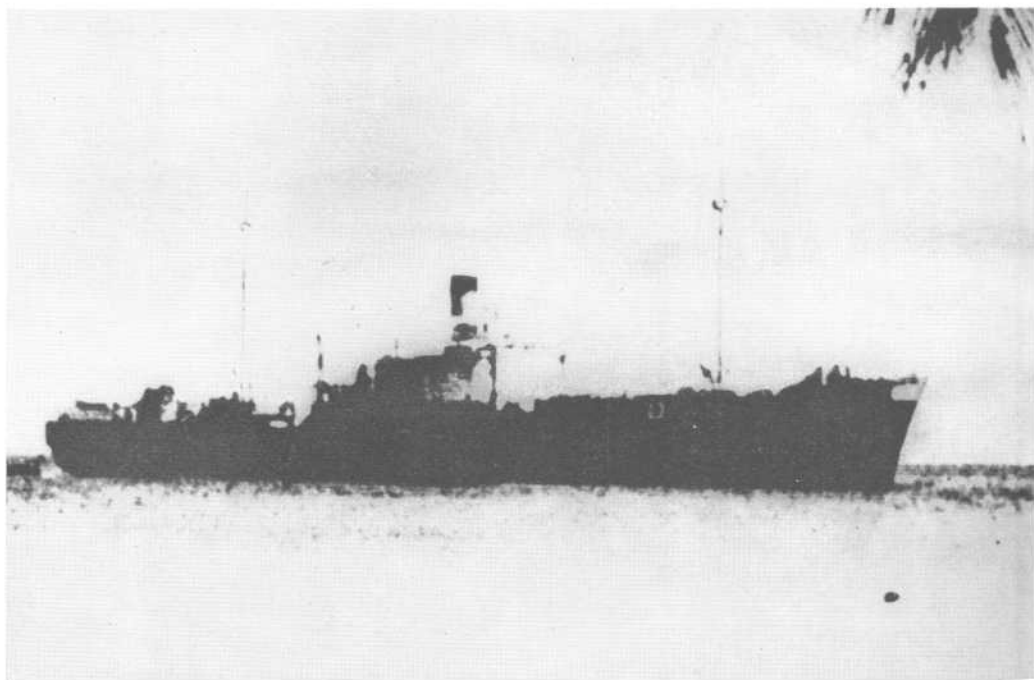
(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Minesweeper H.M.A.S. *Goorangai*.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

British Phosphate Commission's Steamer *Trienza*.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

German raider *Komet*.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

German Raiders at Emirau Island: *Komet* (as *Manyo Maru*), *Kulmerland* (with striped funnel) and *Orion*, 21st December 1940.

no success and *Adelaide* was ordered back to Sydney—*Orara* and *Durra-ween* started sweeping off South East Point, and a quarter of an hour later cut two mines, both of which were sunk by rifle fire. It was, for most of the young reservists in the minesweepers, their introduction to the hard facts of war at sea after months of what had seemed playing at sailors in perfectly safe waters, and the sight of the ugly horned spheres, Fyfe later recalled, made some of them look rather askance and green about the gills.

Within less than twenty-four hours the mining of a second ship, the *City of Rayville*,⁶ first American ship sunk in the war, disclosed the presence of another *Storstad* field at the western entrance to Bass Strait. At 7.30 p.m. on the 8th *City of Rayville*, bound from Adelaide to Melbourne, struck a mine six miles south of Cape Otway, and sank during the night. Again one man was lost, and thirty-seven survivors—the remainder of the ship's company—took to the boats and were rescued by fishing boats from Apollo Bay. *Warrego* and *Swan*, on passage from Nepean Bay, were ordered to this new danger area and arrived off Otway at 2.30 a.m. on the 9th. The two ships began sweeping during the forenoon, and shortly after midday two mines were cut. With the discovery of this second field the Naval Board closed Bass Strait and broadcast the existence of danger areas with a thirty-mile radius from both Wilson's Promontory and Otway. Sweeping continued, and by the end of the month a total of twelve mines—including those which sank the two ships—were accounted for, nine in the Promontory area and three off Otway. At daylight on the 14th November Bass Strait was reopened to traffic. The previous night air searches for the minelayer, which had been carried out daily from New South Wales, Spencer Gulf and Fremantle, were discontinued. They were unsuccessful. *Penguin* and *Storstad* were well to the westward in the Indian Ocean seeking new victims.

Since a brief wireless message intercepted by Perth Radio on the 20th September told of the shelling of the steamer *Commissaire Ramel* (10,061 tons)—a victim to *Atlantis*—in the mid vastness of the Indian Ocean, there had been no alarms from that area. But on the 10th November, while the search for *Penguin* and *Storstad* in Australian coastal waters still continued, the Norwegian tanker *Ole Jacob* (8,306 tons) reported being shelled midway between Ceylon and the north end of Sumatra, *Atlantis*, as was later learned, again being the attacker. The Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, immediately organised a hunting group comprising H.M. Ships *Capetown* and *Durban* and H.M.A. Ships *Canberra* and *Westralia*—*Canberra* being on passage to Australia after escorting US.6 to Bombay. The hunt had no success.

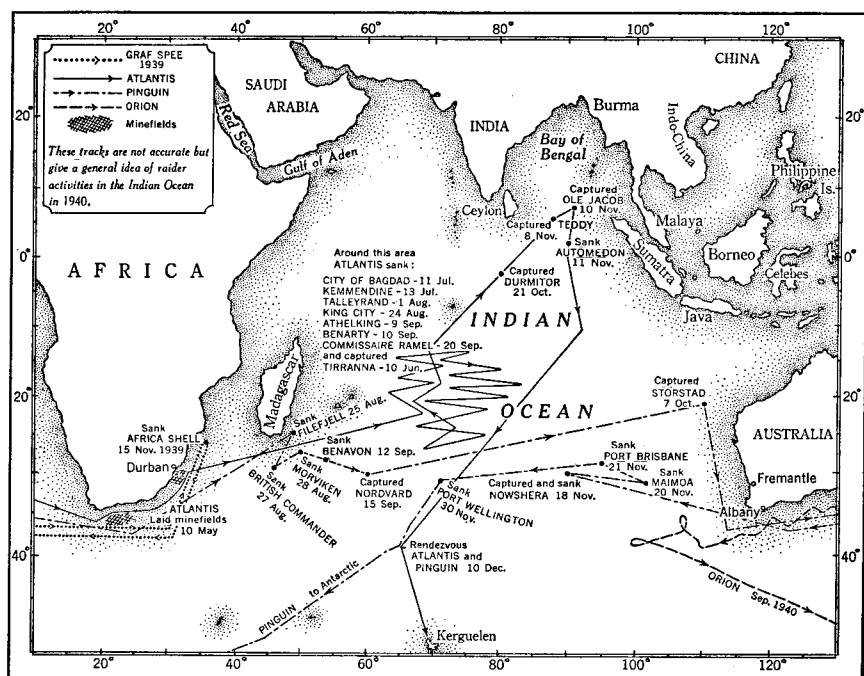
On the day of *Ole Jacob's* alarm the British steamers *Maimoa*⁷ (Captain Cox) and *Port Brisbane*⁸ (Captain Steele) were traversing southern Aus-

⁶ *City of Rayville*, American motor vessel (1920), 5,883 tons, American Pioneer Line.

⁷ *Maimoa*, British steamer (1920), 8,011 tons, Shaw Savill and Albion Co. London, one 4-in gun. Capt H. S. Cox. (During 1914-18 served in troopships *Marathon*, *Themistocles*, and *Miltiades*.) Master of *Maimoa* 1938-40. Of Auckland, NZ; b. London, 5 Dec 1889. Died 19 Mar 1949.

⁸ *Port Brisbane*, British steamer (1923), 8,739 tons, Port Line Ltd, London, two 6-in guns. Capt H. Steele, OBE. (Served throughout 1914-18 in various ships; Chief Officer of *Port Curtis* when torpedoed off Brest Aug 1917.) Master of *Port Brisbane* 1934-40, *Port Darwin* 1945-46. Of Abbey Wood, London; b. Goole, Yorks, Eng, 1 Aug 1890.

tralian coastal waters on their way to England via the Cape. By the 18th of the month they were in the Indian Ocean steaming westward. Far astern of them, at the eastern end of the Australian Bight, convoy US.7, escorted by *Perth*, was steering westward for Fremantle. To the north of them, bound south-east, was *Canberra*, making for Fremantle after the fruitless search for *Atlantis*. Some thousand miles ahead of them—their position unknown beyond the encircling rim of the sea—lay *Penguin* and *Storstad* and their latest victim, the British steamer *Nowshera* (7,920 tons), which they had captured and were busy plundering.



Canberra reached Fremantle on the 20th November. At noon that day *Maimoa* was approximately 800 miles west of Fremantle—well within the confines of the Australia Station—plodding along at 11 knots over a blue and sunny sea. After lunch Captain Cox went up on the bridge and was surprised to see a float plane with British markings flying towards the ship, his attention being attracted by a series of splashes in the water beneath it. They were made by a plummet trailed by a wire with which the aircraft tried unsuccessfully to tear down *Maimoa's* wireless aerials. It eventually brought them down with one of its floats, but not before a distress message was transmitted. Simultaneously *Penguin* was sighted coming over the horizon ahead. Cox altered course to S.S.E., and a three-hour chase began, during which *Maimoa* rigged a spare aerial and con-

tinued to broadcast distress calls, and the aircraft bombed and machine-gunned the ship, which replied with a Lewis gun and rifle. *Penguin* rapidly overhauled *Maimoa*, and when within range opened fire, rapidly scoring hits. Cox decided nothing was to be gained by attempting an unequal engagement with his one 4-inch gun, and ordered abandon ship. He and his crew were taken on board *Penguin*—whose captain, E. F. Krueder, told Cox that had *Maimoa* shot the aircraft down he and all his ship's company would have suffered—and later transferred to *Storstad* and taken in that ship to occupied France. *Maimoa* was sunk by the raider.

Maimoa's first distress message was intercepted by Perth Radio at 4.38 p.m. Western Australian time on the 20th, and passed to Farncomb in *Canberra*, then fuelling and giving night leave in Fremantle. Convoy US.7, with *Perth*, who was to escort the convoy across the Indian Ocean on her way to the Red Sea to relieve *Hobart*, was due at Fremantle the following day, and it was intended that it should sail again on the 22nd, with *Canberra* augmenting the escort to the western limit of the Australia Station. But on receipt of *Maimoa's* signal Farncomb commenced raising steam in anticipation of a Naval Board instruction—which reached him at 7.30 p.m.—to go to the scene of the attack. *Canberra* sailed at 10.30 p.m. on the 20th, before *Perth* and her convoy reached Fremantle, it being Farncomb's intention to go to *Maimoa's* position and then search north-westward.

Port Brisbane was about sixty miles N.N.E. of *Maimoa* when she heard that ship's distress message at 3.30 p.m. (ship's time) on the 20th, and Captain Steele at once altered course away to the northwards. Shortly afterwards a tanker was sighted hull down on the horizon⁹ but did not arouse suspicion. Actually she was the *Storstad*. At midnight on the 20th, *Port Brisbane* resumed a west course, which was maintained throughout the following day, during which smoke was sighted on and off to the eastward.¹ All hands were on double watches from the time of the *Maimoa's* distress message until 9 p.m. on the 21st, which was "a pitch black night", very cloudy and overcast, with a gentle wind and slight sea, when Steele decided to send the men below, including the guns' crews of Australian reservist ratings, and to leave the bridge himself for a short rest. Three-quarters of an hour later the officer on watch sighted a darkened ship close on the port quarter. He at once altered course to starboard to put the stranger astern, and called the captain. The action station alarm was sounded, and Steele ordered a distress message broadcast and rang down to the engine room for best possible speed. But within a minute or two, during which the tranquillity of the night was shattered by the glare of searchlights and bursting shells, the crash of explosions and the deafening roar of steam rushing from shattered pipes, it was all over. *Penguin*—for it was she—illuminated her victim and opened fire at point blank

⁹ According to survivors in *Port Brisbane's* boats at the time of their rescue by *Canberra* on 22 Nov, the tanker was on the northern horizon bound east. Capt Steele, in a report received some years later after his release from a German prison camp, said she was on the southern horizon bound west.

¹ According to the boat parties. Steele's report says "we had seen nothing all day".

range, hitting hull, wireless cabin, and bridge; starting fires; killing one man and wounding others; and jamming the engine room telegraphs one ahead and one astern, so that the ship turned in circles. One of *Port Brisbane's* gun crews had closed up, but Steele ordered them away: "I realised it was useless having men at the guns; at the first movement by anyone to load the guns the cruiser would have blown men and guns off the deck, so I called everyone away to safety." Steele dumped his confidential books and ordered abandon ship, seeing most of his crew away in three life-boats while he and seven others remained on board until the Germans boarded at 11.45 p.m., when they were ordered into one of the boats and later taken on board *Penguin*, after which the raider torpedoed and sank *Port Brisbane*. Of the three life-boats which left the ship, one, in charge of the Second Officer, could not be found by the Germans in the darkness, and the raider's captain told Steele "he had heard over the radio a cruiser was out after him and could not wait to pick up the other boat". That *Canberra* had left Fremantle to search for the raider had, in fact, been broadcast on the 21st in the evening news session of the Australian Broadcasting Commission—the difference in time enabling *Penguin* to get the news earlier in the day.

Canberra was approximately 500 miles E.S.E. of *Port Brisbane* when she intercepted that ship's distress message at 11.10 p.m.—ship's time—on the 21st, and Farncomb turned for her at 26 knots, deciding to search for *Penguin* in the north-west sector rather than the south-west, on the assumption that she would continue north-westerly because she would think herself beyond pursuit from Fremantle; would find victims on the Cape-Singapore trade route; would be more likely to pick up a tanker there; and would have better conditions for fuelling, and operating an aircraft. At 6.30 p.m. on the 22nd, close to the position where *Port Brisbane* was sunk, *Canberra* sighted her three life-boats under sail, and containing the twenty-seven survivors who had got away with the Second Officer, and who were now distributed between his boat and the other two which had been abandoned by the Germans. They were picked up—and told Farncomb that *Penguin* had made off to the north-west after torpedoing *Port Brisbane*—and *Canberra* continued her hunt in that sector. Throughout most of the daylight hours of the following two days she carried out searches with her aircraft covering a wide area, but without sighting her quarry. *Penguin* had proceeded south-west after sinking *Port Brisbane*, and refuelled from *Storstad*. At 3 p.m. on the 24th November *Canberra* gave up the search and set course for Fremantle, reaching there on the 27th November a few hours after *Perth* who, ordered by the Naval Board on the 22nd November to leave Convoy US.7 in Fremantle and proceed in support of *Canberra*, had also returned after a fruitless search. On *Canberra's* arrival at Fremantle, Admiral Crace's flag was transferred to her from *Perth*, and the following day the two ships left escorting US.7 towards Colombo.

The darkness of the night, which apparently engendered a false sense of security in *Port Brisbane* and led to a slackening of precautions and

apparent failure to keep an efficient all-round lookout, led to her being caught completely by surprise by an enemy who, with his crew at action stations and guns trained, was able to steal within a mile of his victim before being sighted. The advantage was thus entirely with the raider. Even so, he took a grave risk in approaching *Port Brisbane* from astern since, had she been prepared, that ship could scarcely have failed to secure hits at such close range, possibly crippling ones, with her two 6-inch guns mounted aft. As it was, the raider got in first, and Steele's concern for the safety of his guns' crews and ship's company generally gave his attacker an easy success. It was a success he repeated a week later in almost identical circumstances when, at 11.50 p.m. on the 30th November, some 1,300 miles farther west, he surprised and sank the *Port Wellington* (8,301 tons) before proceeding south and into the Atlantic.

Although it was not at the time known in Australia that the broadcast news of the dispatch of *Canberra* from Fremantle had been heard by *Penguin*, the fact that the broadcast was made caused the War Cabinet to revise the censorship instructions, which hitherto had exempted Ministerial statements from censorship. The statement about *Canberra* was made in the House of Representatives at 2.30 p.m. on the 21st November by the Minister for the Navy, Mr Hughes.² By a War Cabinet decision of the 26th November it was ruled that press and other reports of Ministerial statements both within and outside Parliament should in future be subject to censorship.

The problem of censorship arose again at this time as the result of the first loss of a ship of the R.A.N. during the war. At 8.45 p.m. on the 20th November the auxiliary minesweeper *Goorangai*,³ crossing Port Phillip Bay, collided with the coastal liner *Duntroon* (10,364 tons) and foundered immediately with the loss of her full complement of twenty-four officers and men. The news quickly reached the newspapers, and it being a marine casualty in which aspects of security were not involved, they claimed the right of immediate publication. The Naval Board, however, secured a censorship ban until next-of-kin of those lost had been informed. This action was subsequently upheld by the Government, and on the 10th December the War Cabinet confirmed supplementary censorship instructions, prepared by the Prime Minister, which laid down that in the event of Service accidents in Australia or Australian waters "relatives of those who have lost their lives should receive prior notification of death, and immediate action should be taken by the Services concerned to advise the next-of-kin by urgent telegram". This procedure was also followed as regards casualties in action. It was a necessary and wise measure which not only enabled the Services, so far as was possible, to soften the blow of bereavement, but to an extent safeguarded near relatives against rumour and false reports of losses.

Before the end of November came additional evidence of raider activity on or near the Australia Station when, on the 27th, the New Zealand

² Mr W. M. Hughes succeeded Mr A. G. Cameron as Minister for the Navy in Oct 1940.

³ HMAS *Goorangai*, auxiliary minesweeper (1919), 223 tons, one 12-pdr gun, 9.5 kts.

Shipping Company's liner *Rangitane* (16,712 tons) reported that she was being attacked 500 miles east of Auckland. Silence followed her brief distress message, but the following day small wreckage was sighted in the position of the attack. On the 3rd December the New Zealand Naval Board reported that the coaster *Holmwood* (546 tons) was overdue at Lyttelton since the 27th November, and that air and sea searches had been fruitless. Two days later *Penguin's* New South Wales minefield was discovered when, at 3.30 p.m., the coastal steamer *Nimbin* (1,052 tons) blew up and sank, with the loss—including the master—of seven of her complement of twenty. Wreckage and survivors were sighted by a patrolling aircraft which directed a rescue ship to the position. Air searches for a possible minelayer were fruitless. Hot on this discovery came that of *Penguin's* Spencer Gulf field. At 8.30 in the evening of the 7th December the British steamer *Hertford* (10,923 tons), bound from Fremantle to Adelaide, struck a mine in the entrance to the Gulf. The ship made water in the two forward holds but did not sink, and was towed to Port Lincoln, being subsequently repaired. There were no casualties.

These successive discoveries—which, had more minesweepers been available, would possibly have been made by them instead of by merchant ships striking mines—placed a heavy strain on the 20th Flotilla and the minesweeping groups. There were insufficient minesweepers then operative effectively to maintain searched channels over the widely distributed focal points and coastal stretches, many of which were in water shallow enough for moored mines. The 20th Flotilla and auxiliary groups had to be hurried from area to area to sweep known fields as these were discovered. Where practicable, danger was lessened by routing vessels outside the hundred fathom line; and on the 11th December a National Security Regulation made the fitting of paravanes compulsory in Australian merchant ships of over 800 tons—though shortage of paravanes delayed its implementation.

Just within the north-eastern limit of the Australia Station, thirty-two miles south of the equator and in longitude 167 degrees east, lies the rich phosphate island of Nauru, or Pleasant Island. Originally one of the German Marshall Islands, it surrendered to H.M.A.S. *Melbourne* in September 1914, and in December 1920 the mandate was conferred upon the British Empire. By agreement between Australia, Great Britain and New Zealand, Australia became responsible for administration on behalf of the grantor governments. In July 1920, these governments purchased the phosphate rights, plant and stocks, of Nauru and the adjacent British possession of Ocean Island, some 150 miles to the eastward. Control of the phosphate business was vested in a board of three commissioners, one to each government, and management was exercised through a general manager in a central office in Melbourne. The trade was a valuable one. For the year ended 30th June 1940 nearly a million tons of phosphate was shipped from Nauru, and about half that amount from Ocean Island.

The commission, in addition to chartering ships to lift the phosphates, also operated its own fleet of four vessels—*Triadic*, *Triaster*, *Triona* and *Trienza*.⁴ Of volcanic origin, both islands are steep-to, with depths of 100 fathoms five or six hundred feet from the shore. There are no harbours or anchorages, but deep moorings had been laid, at which ships secured to load from cantilever jetties. These, however, could be used only in good weather. During south-westerly winds and seas—conditions often extending for seven to ten-day periods from November to March—ships had to stop loading and make an offing. It was customary then for them to drift to save fuel until the weather moderated. At such times—as was well known to those familiar with the trade—there might be several ships so drifting off the island.⁵ This was so during westerly weather on the 7th December 1940, when *Triaster*, *Triadic* (which had arrived that day from Australia) and the British steamer *Komata* (3,900 tons) were drifting in the vicinity; the Norwegian motor vessel *Vinni* (5,181 tons), which had just left Nauru, was on passage to New Zealand; and *Triona*, bound from Newcastle, New South Wales, was due at Nauru on the 8th.

About 6 p.m. (local time) on the 7th, observers on the south end of Nauru sighted a ship some four miles off shore steaming north. Visibility was poor, with frequent rain squalls, and there was divergence of opinion between the harbour master—an official of the Phosphate Commission—and officers of the Nauru Administration as to whether she was a Japanese vessel or *Triona*. The Administrator, Lieut-Colonel Chalmers,⁶ accepted the harbour master's view that she was a Japanese, and assumed that she was a merchant ship bound for Japan. No action was taken.

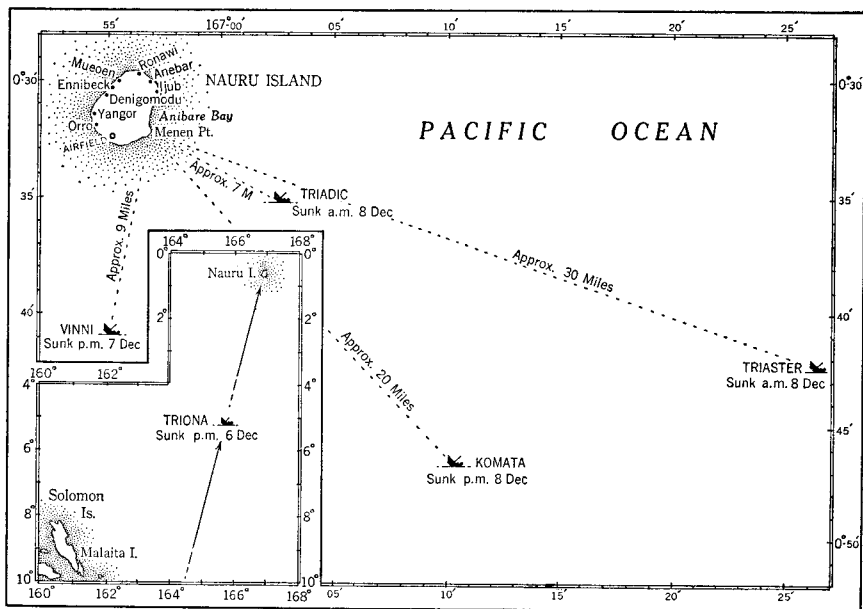
At 4 a.m. on Sunday, the 8th, *Triaster*, which had been drifting for six days waiting for the weather to take up, was 20 miles E.S.E. of the island, steaming shorewards at easy speed with dimmed sidelights. The weather was overcast with occasional rain squalls, and the wind fresh from the W.S.W. *Triadic* was to attempt to land her passengers and mail on the east side of the island, and *Triaster's* master, Captain Rhodes, was steaming in to watch the operation. An hour later, while it was still dark, sounds of gun fire were heard, and a ship on fire was sighted in the direction of Nauru. Concluding that she was *Triadic*, and the victim of a raider, Rhodes at once turned *Triaster* away, darkened ship, and called for maximum speed. With dawn breaking, a ship was sighted astern, and was taken to be *Triona* "making a getaway also". But about 7 a.m. the pursuing vessel sheered and opened fire. "When the raider, which we had so hoped was the *Triona*, continued to shell us, I decided that there was no point in carrying on with a probably heavy loss of life, so I stopped *Triaster*

⁴ Of 6,378, 6,032, 4,413 and 6,378 tons respectively.

⁵ In Dec 1939, during a westerly spell, 17 ships were lying-to off the islands at one time.

⁶ Lt-Col F. R. Chalmers, CMG, DSO. (1st AIF: CO 27 Bn 1917-19.) Administrator of Nauru 1938-43. B. Hobart, 4 Jan 1881. Executed by Japanese, 26 Mar 1943.

and ordered everyone into the boats.”⁷ Rhodes and his crew were taken on board the raider, while an armed party from that ship boarded *Triaster* and sank her with scuttling charges about 8 a.m. In the raider, Rhodes learned that she was *Orion*, which had in company *Komet* and the supply ship *Kulmerland*, both of which were masquerading as Japanese merchant ships, the first-named as the *Manyo Maru*. It was learned also that, in addition to *Triaster* and *Triadic*, *Triona* had been sunk by the raiders the previous Friday, and *Vinni* the following day.



Meanwhile the burning *Triadic* had been sighted from Nauru, with two strange vessels standing by; but bad weather conditions made observation difficult. The strangers were called by radio and made no answer, and soon after 7 a.m. Nauru asked Ocean Island by radio if any distress message had been heard there. The answer was no, to which Nauru replied "O.K., nil heard here". It seems that at this time there was no suspicion on Nauru that *Triadic* had become a raider's victim, but shortly before 9 a.m. a message was broadcast from the island reporting Japanese ships in the vicinity, and just afterwards unusual signals were heard. Though it was not then known ashore, they resulted from an attack on *Komata*, the last of the five ships in the vicinity of the island. *Komata* sighted the three enemy ships about a mile and a half distant in thick rain squalls and poor visibility at 9 a.m. on the 8th. She attempted to run, and to broadcast a distress message the jamming of which by the raider made the "unusual

⁷ From report by Capt Rhodes. Capt A. Rhodes. (Served throughout 1914-18 in various ships, including *Port Nicholson*, sunk by mine off Dunkirk 15 Jan 1917.) Master of *Triaster* 1938-40, *Triona* 1945-48, *Triadic* since 1948. Of Melbourne; b. Leicester, Eng, 28 Oct 1893.

signals" heard at Nauru.⁸ At 9.20 the enemy opened fire, and *Komata* suffered eight hits by 5.9-inch shells which did considerable damage, killed the Chief Officer, and mortally wounded the Second. At 9.30 the master, Captain Fish, stopped and abandoned ship, the survivors being taken on board the raider. Scuttling charges were placed and exploded by the Germans, but the ship remained afloat, eventually being sunk by gun fire at 5.15 p.m.⁹ The end of *Komata* was apparently seen from Nauru. When visibility improved in the late afternoon, observers there saw through binoculars two vessels south-east of the island distant some 20 to 25 miles. One was on fire, and only the forecastle and poop were visible. The other, and larger ship, was shelling her. At 4.10 p.m. both vessels disappeared, and nothing further was seen from the island.

By this time the Naval Board was aware of untoward happenings at Nauru. At 10.48 a.m. the Administrator had signalled to the Board and, although not mentioning raiders, told of the strange Japanese vessel sighted off the island on the 7th December, and of the burning vessel identified as *Triadic* seen the following morning with two apparently Japanese vessels standing by. "Other British and Allied vessels which are drifting on account of weather and which should be in vicinity of *Triadic* but which have not been sighted and which have not communicated anything untoward are *Triaster*, *Komata*, *Vinni*, *Triona* due Nauru 8th December." The Naval Board correctly appreciated the situation, and less than an hour after the dispatch of the Nauru message Navy Office broadcast instructions to ships at or bound to Nauru and Ocean Island to disperse and make for Suva or Port Moresby, an instruction that was repeated at intervals for some days.

For the time being, nothing else could be done. No naval ships were immediately available to go to the islands. Of the cruisers on the station, *Canberra* was in the Indian Ocean returning from the escort of US.7, and *Adelaide* was refitting in Sydney. Nearest to the islands, but some 2,400 miles from them, was the armed merchant cruiser *Manoora*, which reached Darwin escorting the troopship *Zealandia* on the 8th December, the day of the attacks at Nauru. Meanwhile the authorities, both on Nauru and in Australia, were in the dark as to what had actually happened, the number of raiders, and the losses they had inflicted. Only *Triadic* had been identified as a victim by observers on the island, and it was not known if the other ships in the vicinity had managed to disperse and escape. During the succeeding days the only indication of the possible fate of ships in the area was the washing ashore on Ocean Island of an

⁸ The strength of the raider's signals at Nauru completely drowned *Komata's* message at that island, but her distress call was partially heard at Ocean Island at 8.53 a.m. their time. As received it stated that a ship was being attacked by a raider, but gave no name, position, or other details. Instead of immediately rebroadcasting it, Ocean Island tried to pass it to Suva an hour later. The raider thereupon, using a transposed version of *Komata's* call sign and pretending to be a Japanese ship, broadcast a claim to have made a signal to all ships at 8.53. This allayed suspicions which Ocean Island might have had, and consequently the report of the distress signal which the island was attempting to pass to Suva was not made.

⁹ From report by Capt Fish. Capt W. W. Fish. (1914-18: obtained leave from shipping company and served as lieutenant RNR in HM ships, North Sea, Gallipoli and Mediterranean.) Master of *Kauri* 1939-40, *Komata* 1940, *Kekerangu* 1941-42, *Ngakuta* 1942-43, *River Burdekin* 1943-45. Of Sydney; b. Southampton, Eng, 29 Apr 1888.

oar from *Komata* on the 12th December, and the arrival at Suva on the 15th of S.S. *Silksworth* (4,921 tons), which had been in the vicinity of Ocean Island during the Nauru attacks and had made for Suva on receipt of the Navy Office broadcast.

But on the 24th December the District Officer at Kavieng, on the north-west extremity of New Ireland, reported that on the 21st December three enemy raiders had landed some 500 survivors from raided ships on Emirau Island in the Bismarck Archipelago, seventy miles from Kavieng. The three raiders sailed again by midnight on the 21st. Survivors included persons from *Notou*, *Turakina*, *Ringwood*, *Holmwood*, *Rangitane*, *Triona*, *Vinni*, *Triadic*, *Triaster*, and *Komata*. On receipt of this report, the Naval Board arranged for the Australian steamer *Nellore* (6,942 tons) to proceed from Rabaul to Emirau Island and pick up the castaways. This was done, and they were taken to Townsville, where they landed on the 1st January 1941.

Light was thus thrown on the fate of the missing ships. But not until German records were secured after the war was the full story known. As stated above, *Orion* sank *Notou* and *Turakina* on the 16th and 20th August respectively; and on the 14th October, while on passage from the Marshall Islands to Lamutrik in the Carolines in company with the supply ship *Regensburg*, sank *Ringwood*. At Lamutrik the two ships met *Komet* and *Kulmerland*, and all four remained there for two days while the raider captains—Weyher in *Orion* and Eyssen, the senior of the two, in *Komet*—planned joint operations. They left Lamutrik on the 20th October. *Regensburg* sailed for Japan, and the others steered southwards between the New Hebrides and Fiji for the New Zealand shipping lanes. After some fruitless days east of New Zealand it was decided to sail north again and attack Nauru. The three ships went south of Chatham Island west about, and on the 25th November met and sank *Holmwood*, which was bound from Chatham Island to Lyttelton. *Holmwood* failed to transmit a raider distress message, a fact which possibly sealed the fate of *Rangitane* which, having sailed from Auckland early on the 25th for the United Kingdom via the Pacific, was intercepted by the raiders two days later and sunk by gun fire and torpedoes. Eleven of her passengers and crew, including six women, were killed by the raiders' gun fire, and the rest made prisoners.¹ The raiders reached the Kermadec Islands on the 29th November, where all women and children prisoners were transferred to *Kulmerland*, and the three ships then continued for Nauru, sailing between New Caledonia and the New Hebrides and to the east of the Solomon Islands. North-east of the Solomons *Triona* was sighted on the 6th December, and sunk by torpedoes after a chase during which shelling killed three of her crew. The sixty-eight survivors were captured.

The raider captains had planned to attack shore installations at Nauru at dawn on the 8th December in an endeavour to cripple the phosphate

¹ According to *German Raiders in the Pacific*, published by War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, New Zealand. German records state that two were killed on board *Rangitane*, two were probably drowned, one woman and two men died on board the raider.

industry, but bad weather decided them to confine their attention to ships. *Komet* went on ahead to reconnoitre, and in the evening of the 7th December intercepted and sank *Vinni*. She was herself sighted from the shore and, in view of her *Manyo Maru* disguise was accepted as a Japanese merchant ship bound for Japan. The raiders joined company again, and in the early hours of the 8th *Orion* attacked *Triadic*, and left her on fire with *Kulmerland* standing by while she pursued and sank *Triaster*. Meanwhile *Komet* joined *Kulmerland* and tried to sink *Triadic* with scuttling charges but failed, and *Triadic* was subsequently sunk by *Orion*. *Komet* was, however, later responsible for sinking *Komata*. During the evening of the 8th December the raiders withdrew and assembled 20 miles east of Nauru. The three ships now held 675 prisoners, comprising 257 (including 52 women and five children) in *Kulmerland*; 265 in *Orion*; and 153 in *Komet*. It was decided that, as weather conditions precluded a landing, *Komet* and *Kulmerland* would go to Ailinglap in the Marshalls where *Komet* would refuel, while *Orion* operated north-west of Nauru. They would then rendezvous north of Nauru and effect a landing if conditions were favourable. This program was followed, but on the 15th, the date they again joined forces, the weather was still bad, and intercepted radio messages included some from Navy Office, Melbourne, ordering ships bound for Nauru and Ocean Island to disperse. Eyssen thereupon decided to sail for Emirau and disembark all prisoners.

The three ships anchored off Emirau at dawn on the 21st December. By midday, 343 Europeans and 171 coloured prisoners² had been landed. Upon sailing shortly after midnight on the 21st, the raiders parted company. *Orion* proceeded to Lamutrik, and later went to Maug in the Carolines to overhaul her engines. *Kulmerland* went to Japan. *Komet* was off Rabaul during the night of the 24th December, where a project to lay mines from her motor-boat was abandoned when the boat's engines failed. She then returned to Nauru, and appeared off the island at 5.45 a.m. on the 27th December. After warning those on shore not to use the wireless, and signalling her intention to destroy the phosphate loading plant by gun fire, she hoisted the German flag, draped German ensigns over the Japanese markings on her sides, and opened fire at 6.40 a.m. For about an hour she shelled oil tanks, cantilevers and storage bins, boats, stores, buildings and mooring buoys. She then cruised close in shore for about half an hour, after which she made off to the south-east. Nauru, which had up to then maintained silence, then informed Navy Office by radio of the attack. There was some indignation on the island when news of the attack was shortly broadcast from Australia, with the information that the radio station and power house had escaped damage, this being interpreted as an invitation to the raider to return and complete

² The decision to release white seamen at Emirau was opposed by Weyher, who held that there was danger of compromising the raider bases in the Japanese mandates; and that trained officers and crews were as valuable as ships to the British. Although Eyssen had his way so far as going to Emirau, Weyher refused to land the white prisoners from *Orion* there. They were subsequently trans-shipped, at Lamutrik, to the supply ship *Ermland* (10,000 tons), and taken to Germany via Cape Horn and Bordeaux, where *Ermland* arrived on the 3 April 1941.

the destruction. But in the event it was the last visit of German ships to Nauru in the war, and *Komet* transferred her activities to the Indian Ocean.

The December events at Nauru gave rise to rumours, both in Australia and New Zealand, that the raiders had been helped by treachery in the islands. These rumours were completely disproved by investigations which were carried out at the time. The Germans were helped by a number of factors, not the least of which was the existence for them of near-by secret operational bases in the Japanese mandated islands, and the regular supply of fuel, stores, and, no doubt, intelligence, to these bases by German ships from Japan. Though there is no evidence that the Japanese Government was aware of the activities of raiders in the mandated islands, there is little doubt that the Japanese Navy had more than suspicions on the matter. The raiders were seen, and their captains questioned by officers of Japanese ships at both Lamutrik and Maug on more than one occasion. No less than seven German supply ships loaded in Japan for raiders, and some made more than one voyage to the southern operational bases with supplies. Their loading in Japan was under the direction of the German Naval Attaché, Weneker.

The normal conditions of the phosphate trade were certainly known to the raider captains, and it is not unlikely that the current shipping situation at the islands was known to them through the interception of radioed weather reports passed between Nauru and Australia in international code with substitute ships' names. An Australian naval inquiry conducted at the islands shortly after the December events, demonstrated that a simple correlation of various messages would enable the raider to form an accurate picture of the shipping position at Nauru. The Germans had also acquired the means of decoding naval broadcasts to British merchant ships, and during the Emirau Island period learned, from this source, that a warship would be going to Nauru from Australia escorting the phosphate steamer *Trienza*.

But basically the immunity and success of the raiders was due to the fact that, owing to the comparative isolation of the islands, it was impracticable to defend them with the means available. The islands themselves had no shore defences, since, under the terms of the mandate, such were not permitted. They were beyond the range of air cover. Because of circumstances peculiar to the islands—the lack of harbours, the necessity of ships lying off and on sometimes for days at a stretch through stress of weather with consequent concentration at what was, in effect, a well-known position in mid-ocean—protection on the spot by naval vessels would have had to be constant to have been effective, and the ships to give such protection were then lacking.

As a result of the November raider activity in the Indian Ocean, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr Curtin) had raised in the Advisory War Council on the 2nd December the question of the existing disposition of the Australian Squadron in relation to the naval defence of Australian

ports and seaborne trade in Australian waters. Admiral Colvin, who was present at the discussion, had prepared a review of Australian dispositions which stated, among conclusions reached, that naval dispositions must be on a world wide plan and arranged to give the heaviest protection where most required; and that it was considered that:

the naval dispositions now in force adequately protect Australian trade and ports. If enemy attacks become more frequent in the Australian area the dispositions may have to be adjusted.

Adequacy of protection could not be said to apply to the phosphate trade which, at the islands end, was defenceless. It was a question of priorities in protection needs, which descended the scale as distance lengthened from enemy bases, active war theatres, and main trade routes. Discussing the "alarming figures" of losses of merchant ships by enemy action, Colvin's review stated:

The great majority of these losses have been suffered in the immediate vicinity of the United Kingdom from submarine and air attack. Next are losses in the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans in that order. Our dispositions and remedial measures must be based on these facts and on the overriding assumption that supplies and food to and from the United Kingdom are the most essential requirements for the waging of the war.

This was the correct view of a world-wide situation, in which the protection needs of the Australia Station came well down in the priority scale. Within the station, first call on the limited forces left for its protection was made by troop convoys, and the main approach and coastwise trade routes, with isolated outposts such as Nauru again low in the scale. As had been stated at the Singapore Conference in October 1940, the minimum forces adequate for the defence of Australia in the event of war with Japan would not suffice for the protection of the Nauru-Ocean Island phosphate trade. Neither did the forces available in December 1940, while Japan was still neutral. That fact was apparently accepted in view of what were seen as greater needs elsewhere, though the importance to Australian primary production of the phosphate trade had not been overlooked. During 1938 and early 1939, Australian Naval Intelligence carried out a survey of the subject, and as a result of discussions with the British Phosphate Commission, steps were taken by the Commission to increase shipments from Nauru and Ocean Island and build up a stockpile of raw rock phosphate in Australia. This to an extent lessened the impact of the Nauru raids on the Australian economy, for their most damaging result was not the loss of the ships, but the serious fall in output of phosphates from the island during 1941.

The meeting of the Advisory War Council which, on the 2nd December 1940, considered Admiral Colvin's review, decided to recommend that the Prime Minister should explore the possibility of Britain basing three or four capital ships at Singapore as a deterrent to Japanese action. Six days later occurred the German raids on the ships at Nauru. The following day—as was stated in Chapter 5—the Naval Board asked the Admiralty

for a redistribution of Australian naval forces to meet the raider situation, and it was arranged that *Sydney* and *Westralia* should return to Australia. This allowed close naval cover to be provided in the Nauru-Ocean Island area. *Manoora*, escorting *Trienza*, arrived at Ocean Island on the 4th January 1941, and Nauru on the 6th; and during subsequent months continuous patrols of the island areas were maintained by H.M.A. Ships *Adelaide*, *Westralia*, and *Manoora*, and by New Zealand units. In January 1941 the Commonwealth Government, holding that the German raid justified the defensive fortification of the islands despite the provisions of the mandate, decided to install two 6-inch guns at each island. The following month, however, this decision was reversed because of the shortage of guns and the growing threat of war with Japan. Two field guns, with small military detachments, were all that could be spared to each island for its shore defences. There was one further result of the Nauru raids, the institution of Trans-Tasman commercial convoys. The first of these, Convoy VK.1, consisting of the merchant ships *Empire Star*, *Port Chalmers*, *Empress of Russia*, and *Maunganui*, sailed from Sydney for Auckland on the 30th December 1940, escorted by H.M.N.Z.S. *Achilles*.

CHAPTER 7

WESTERN DESERT CAMPAIGN

WHEN, during the Anglo-Egyptian treaty negotiations in 1929, Mr Bruce as Prime Minister of Australia emphasised that no treaty would be acceptable to the Commonwealth unless it adequately safeguarded the Suez Canal, he expressed that realisation of the significance of sea communications which informed Australian thoughts on defence. That significance lay in the fact that all oceans are but connected parts of a world sea on which effective action by allies against a common enemy could only be achieved by a common strategy. It was as a result of a common strategy that in 1940 Australia's local naval defence was denuded to reinforce offensive strength at a more vital point, the Suez Canal and its approaches.¹ No such common strategy existed between the Germans and the Italians, nor even between the respective dictators and their commanders-in-chief. Instead of regarding the sea as one and indivisible, the Italians insisted that the Mediterranean was exclusively an Italian sphere, a conception which was at first endorsed by Hitler. The shelving of the plans for the invasion of England in the autumn of 1940 turned Hitler's thoughts to the complete subjugation of Europe as a preliminary to England's defeat. He became obsessed with the necessity to attack and conquer Russia. In viewing the Mediterranean in relation to German action he looked mainly to the west, to the entry of Spain into the war and the capture of Gibraltar as part of the European defence plan.

Raeder, on the other hand, continued to stress the decisive strategic influence of war in the Mediterranean, and the opportunity it offered for concerted action with Italy to deliver fatal blows against the British. Towards the end of July 1940, the German Army and Naval Staffs proposed alternatives to the invasion of England should that operation be postponed. The Army proposed that the Italians should be supported in North Africa with two Panzer divisions. The Navy emphasised that the object of German-Italian warfare should be to drive the British from the Mediterranean, and secure Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. "Preparations for this operation must be begun at once so that they are completed before the U.S.A. steps in. It should not be considered of secondary importance, but as one of the main blows against Britain."² Meanwhile the Italian offensive in North Africa hung fire. By the 4th October, when Mussolini and Hitler met at the Brenner, Mussolini told his ally that he had ordered the second stage of the attack (to Mersa Matruh) to

¹ German naval strategy, based primarily on destroying British sea communications by submarine warfare, aimed also at preventing offensive British fleet concentrations by causing defensive dispersal of forces. Writing after the war, the German Admiral Weichold stated: "The view of the German Admiralty was that the operational use of all available surface vessels was to bind as many British warships to the Atlantic as possible so as to assist the U-boat campaign. Furthermore the attacks of German cruisers and battleships in the Atlantic and the appearance of German raiders in every sea aimed at pinning down as much British sea power and war potentiality as possible. The amount of tonnage sunk was only a by-product of this policy."

² *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs* (1945), 6 Sep 1940.

begin between the 10th and 15th October and to be concluded by the end of the month. Hitler offered him "specialist forces" for the attack, but Mussolini replied that he would need no help for the second stage. He reserved the right to let Hitler know what he would need for the third—the conquest of Egypt.

Hitler's main preoccupation continued to be his plan for an attack on Russia, as a prelude to which he proceeded, politically and by military infiltration, to secure control of the Balkans. Here his program was interrupted when the Italians, instead of attacking in North Africa, invaded Greece on the 28th October. This brought the Balkans into unwanted prominence, and widened the field of British activity in the Eastern Mediterranean. Britain took immediate advantage of this by occupying Crete, raising in Hitler's mind apprehensions of air attacks from there on the Rumanian oil fields. On the 4th November 1940, Raeder learned that as a result of the Italian action Hitler had decided that so far as the Eastern Mediterranean was concerned, two divisions of troops were to be prepared to support the Italian offensive in Greece if necessary, but no "specialist forces" were to be sent to Libya, as "an Alexandria offensive in conjunction with Italian preparations is not possible until the summer of 1941. But after the capture of Mersa Matruh the German air force was to attack the fleet at Alexandria and mine the Suez Canal."³

The German Naval Staff was less sanguine as to probable developments in Libya. They felt some concern at the situation, and in an appreciation presented to Hitler on the 14th November stated that after tough endurance the British could be expected to go over to the offensive, and that her main effort

will undoubtedly be directed towards the African and Mediterranean area. Firstly she will strengthen her Suez position, then offensive action in Libya and Abyssinia is possible. . . . The German Admiralty Staff sees no occasion for anxiety, but in order to remove the threat from the Mediterranean and African areas considers it essential to embark on political and military precautions including the final settlement of the relationship with France.⁴

Within little more than three weeks of the presentation of this appreciation, the British proved its accuracy by taking offensive action in Libya and Abyssinia.

II

The Italian advance into Egypt, begun with great reluctance by Marshal Graziani on the 13th September 1940,⁵ and harried, but not seriously opposed by the withdrawing British, halted just east of Sidi Barrani, where the Italians established themselves in a series of fortified camps extending from the coast some fifty miles inland to the escarpment. The British had anticipated a further Italian move towards Mersa Matruh.

³ Vice-Adm Assmann's "Headline Diary".

⁴ Assmann, "Headline Diary".

⁵ Graziani, some weeks before the advance began, told Ciano: "We move towards a defeat which, in the desert, must inevitably develop into a rapid and total disaster." Ciano remarked of the advance: "Never has a military operation been undertaken so much against the will of the commanders." Ciano, *Diary*.

It did not, however, take place, and plans were accordingly laid for an attack on the Italian positions. The topography lent itself admirably to combined service operations, since it confined the Italian communications to a narrow coastal strip with a particularly vulnerable bottleneck at Halfaya Pass just west of Salum, where the escarpment comes down to the coast and the road was open to bombardment from the sea.

Final plans for the British offensive, which was to be commanded by Lieut-General O'Connor⁶ under the direction of General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson,⁷ were discussed at a conference at Cairo attended by Admiral Cunningham on the 4th December. It was then the view of General Wavell⁸ that it would probably only be possible to conduct an operation lasting four or five days, "since that appeared to be the limit for which supply arrangements could be made". He told Cunningham, however, that he was "determined to go all out if the Italians showed signs of making off". Naval plans and preparations allowed for three initial stages. The first was the destruction or capture of enemy forces in the vicinity of Sidi Barrani, in which the naval role was to provide harassing bombardment. The second was the raiding of Italian communications and installations farther west in the region of Buq Buq, when the navy would assist by bombardments along the coast and landing stores near Sidi Barrani. The third stage envisaged the enemy retreating up the escarpment roads at Halfaya and Salum.

Orders for naval operations, initially conducted under the direction of Rear-Admiral H. B. Rawlings, embraced stages one and two. The bombarding ships were *Terror*, which had been brought down from Suda Bay, and the gunboats *Aphis* and *Ladybird*, with a covering force of destroyers. Advance preparations for the landing of supplies in stage two were based on earlier preparations for a British retirement to the east in which Mersa Matruh had been envisaged as cut off by land and supplied by sea, with the result that a basis of a supply organisation was already in existence there and at Alexandria. Stage three was "largely an optimistic hope and one which in any case could only follow some time later",⁹ but a force consisting of *Barham*, *Valiant*, *Illustrious*, *York* and *Calcutta* (Force "C"), with destroyers, was detailed to bombard in this stage if required. Cooperation between the land and sea forces was provided by the appointment of liaison officers, and the naval officer at O'Connor's headquarters was an Australian, Lieut-Commander Green.¹

⁶ General Sir Richard O'Connor, GCB, DSO, MC. Comd 6 British Div 1940, Western Desert Force 1940-41, British Troops in Egypt 1941, VIII Corps 1944; AG to the Forces 1946-47. Regular soldier; b. Kashmir, India, 21 Aug 1889.

⁷ Field Marshal Lord Wilson, GCB, GBE, DSO. GOC-in-C in Egypt 1939-40, Cyrenaica 1941, British Troops in Greece 1941, Allied Forces in Syria 1941, Persia-Iraq Comd 1942-43; C-in-C Middle East 1943; Supreme Allied Cdr, Mediterranean Theatre 1944. Regular soldier; b. 5 Sep 1881.

⁸ Field Marshal Rt Hon Earl Wavell, GCB, GCSI, GCIE, CMG, MC. GOC-in-C Middle East 1939-41, India 1941-43; Supreme Cdr SW Pacific Jan-Mar 1942; Viceroy of India 1943-47. Regular soldier; b. 5 May 1883. Died 24 May 1950.

⁹ Admiral Rawlings, "Narrative of Operations".

¹ Cdr A. H. Green, DSC; RAN. HMAS *Canberra* 1939-40; comd HMAS's *Warrego* 1942, *Napier* 1942-44, *Norman* 1945. Of Melbourne; b. Surrey Hills, Vic, 23 Mar 1906.

On Saturday, 7th December 1940, the day on which the stealthy British land advance across the 70 miles of desert began in preparation for the assault on the 9th, *Terror* and *Aphis* left Alexandria and met *Ladybird* some 150 miles to the westward. By 11 p.m. on the 8th the three ships were in position off Sidi Barrani and, assisted by flares dropped by aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm, opened fire in a bombardment of about an hour and a half. *Terror* and *Aphis* had as targets strong-posts and motor transport in Maktila, the easternmost Italian camp; and *Ladybird* enemy concentrations at Sidi Barrani. Accurate but fruitless enemy counter-fire was experienced. On completion of the bombardment the ships retired to the eastward. The British land attack began at 7.15 a.m. on the 9th and was immediately successful. Before nightfall that day British troops had reached the sea coast between Sidi Barrani and Buq Buq, and a naval bombardment arranged for that night was cancelled. Sidi Barrani was in British hands by dark on the 10th, and the Italians in full retreat to the westward.

At Salum the road runs on flat land a few feet above sea level. Just to the westward the escarpment comes down to the coast, and the tawny sides of the high plateau fall almost sheer to the shore, with the road winding up in clear view from the sea. Bombardment of the escarpment roads by *Terror* and the gunboats, with destroyers and minesweepers joining in as occasion offered, began on the 11th. Heavy counter-fire was met, but at times the gunboats closed to 1,500 yards, using pom-poms and 3-inch guns with considerable effect on "the many targets, some of them perfect, which offered along the road". By sunset on the 11th the westward movement of the enemy had become a rout, and "troops could be seen throwing away their arms, whilst others were on the beach waving their shirts as a sign of surrender".

Participation by Australian destroyers began on the 11th December when Force "C" arrived in Salum Bay with *Vampire*, *Voyager* and *Vendetta* among the screening destroyers. The force was to bombard Bardia on the morning of the 12th, but a heavy sandstorm prevented the operation, and the ships returned to Alexandria.

On the 15th December Captain Waller was made Senior Naval Officer Afloat for ships engaged on the operations in support of the army, with *Vampire*, *Vendetta*, *Voyager*, *Waterhen*, *Terror*, the gunboats, and a number of minesweepers and anti-submarine trawlers constituting the Inshore Squadron under his command. The ships of the squadron performed a variety of tasks. They carried out bombardments and night offensive patrols; protected the supply ships and water carriers (some themselves acted as water carriers on emergency occasions); and generally maintained the essential sea supply lines to the rapidly moving battle front. The strip of arid coastline presented in concentrated form the main combined operational problem of the Mediterranean, that of supply and transportation by sea in the face of continuous and heavy enemy attack. This developing attack was mainly from the air, but it included also that by submarines, motor torpedo boats, and fixed and mobile shore artillery, while mines were a constant menace.

III

The British captured Salum on the evening of the 16th December, and main supply into the port began the following day. The roadstead was exposed to submarine and air attack but the enemy relied on the latter, and in the lack of shore anti-aircraft protection the main defence was provided by the anti-aircraft guns of the Inshore Squadron. On the 18th December appeared a further threat to ships at Salum when "Bardia Bill", an 8-inch gun at that Italian stronghold, carried out its first bombardment of the roads. Until the fall of Bardia it and its fellows "kept up a desultory fire except from 23rd to 25th December, employing spotting aircraft which from time to time were shot down by our fighters". Though bombing and shelling did little actual damage, they demoralised the Levantine labour corps, and necessitated keeping all merchant ships under way close inshore during twilight and bright moonlight, with ships of the Inshore Squadron to seaward of them as protection against torpedo bombers. All this delayed the landing of supplies; but by the 24th December, by which date a threatened water crisis had been overcome by improvising supply by any vessel available, some 700 tons of petrol, 750 tons of water, and 400 tons of stores had been landed. They were quantities which, averaged on a daily basis, met military requirements. By the 27th December 365 tons of water and 150 tons of stores and provisions were being landed daily, and at the end of the month the rate of discharge was such that reserves were steadily accumulating.

Meanwhile the squadron continued its harassing bombardments of enemy positions. *Voyager*, who in company with *Vendetta* supported *Terror* in that ship's bombardment of Bardia on the 16th December, was straddled by shells from an Italian battery of four guns, and had one man wounded. *Vampire* was on anti-submarine patrol near by, and at twilight with *Voyager* helped to drive off two torpedo bombers which ineffectually dropped their torpedoes at a range of about 3,000 yards.

The period was one of intense activity and hard work for the squadron. Of the four destroyers, only three were usually simultaneously available, and Waller shifted from ship to ship as occasion demanded. *Vampire* was absent for three weeks from the 19th December, when she went to Alexandria for engine repairs. *Wryneck* replaced her in the squadron on the 28th December, but the number was again reduced to three on the 30th, when *Waterhen* collided with and sank the anti-submarine trawler *Bandolero*,² and did herself damage which necessitated a month in dock at Port Tewfik for repairs. *Diamond* and *Dainty* of the 10th Flotilla joined, each for three or four days only, on the 29th December 1940 and the 1st January 1941 respectively. On the 2nd January the bombarding force was strengthened by the arrival at Salum of the gunboat *Gnat*.³ She had reached Alexandria from Bombay, and her fitting out, which included mounting her guns after passage, was completed on the 1st January. Her

² HMS *Bandolero*, trawler (1935), 913 tons; sunk 30 Dec 1940.

³ HMS *Gnat*, gunboat (1915), 625 tons, two 6-in. guns, 14 kts; torpedoed off Bardia, 21 Oct 1941.

gun trials were carried out in a bombardment of Bardia, "perhaps a measure", Admiral Rawlings remarked in his narrative, "of the improvised nature of certain affairs".

There were sunny days of exquisite colour, when the sea, varying in hue from palest jade to deepest blue, was fringed with glittering surf along the yellow shore. There were grey wintry days of northerly gales; and blinding days of fierce southerlies when sandstorms reduced visibility to a few hundred yards and those above deck in the destroyers peered through sand goggles and described their job as "sand-groping". There were brief hours of leave in captured Italian ports, when official and unofficial "rabbiting" (souvenir hunting) parties were organised. On such occasions the destroyers added to their anti-aircraft armament with Italian Breda guns and ammunition which were to stand them in good stead later. The westward advance by water kept pace with that of the army by land. It was impracticable to run convoys or to give close escort to individual ships, and from Alexandria and Mersa Matruh the supply ships hugged the coast for protection. In the van of the advance the bombardment forces paved the way for land assaults and harried the retreating Italians, and by night gun fire, star shells, and aircraft flares marked the area of encounter in brief vivid flashes.

Enemy air attacks, in which mines were dropped in addition to bombs and torpedoes, continued. A diarist in *Waterhen*, at Salum on Christmas day, recorded:

Torpedo attack by aircraft. 3.30 p.m. attack by 24 bombers escorted by 18 fighters. First salvo missed *Waterhen* 40 yards clear on starboard side. *Chakla* near-missed and leaking. Many soldiers killed on shore. Great dog-fight by Gladiators, several bombers and Italian fighters shot down by our fighters. Last Italian fighter escaped from two Gladiators by a vertical dive from about 8,000 feet and made off at sea level (a good effort). 7.15 p.m. torpedo attack by aircraft turned away by fire from *Waterhen's* main armament. Nine p.m. left Sollum on patrol to westward of Bardia.

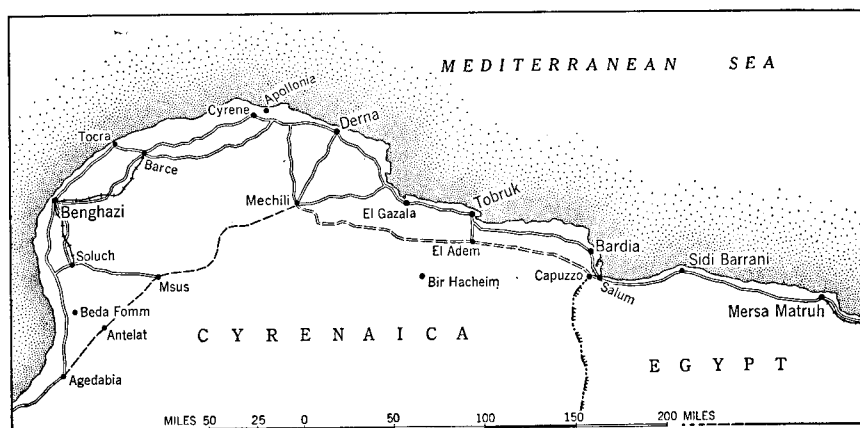
The Italians also endeavoured to use the inshore route to transport supplies but with scant success, and a number of their ships, small auxiliary schooners of around 150 tons, were destroyed or captured by destroyers of the squadron. Three hours after leaving Salum on Christmas night *Waterhen* intercepted the *Tireremo Diritto*, and sank her by gun fire after removing "24 men and four officers, one Fascist officer and one dog", together with Christmas mail for the Italian garrison at Bardia. At 1.45 a.m. on the 30th December *Voyager* intercepted the *Zingarella* (190 tons), which hove to when a shot was fired across her bows. The weather was too bad to go alongside or lower a boat, but when hailed the Italians replied that they had English prisoners on board. "At this moment," recorded Morrow, *Voyager's* captain,

a sergeant of the Queen's Own shouted that he had the situation in hand, and he and eight of his regiment had 100 Italians battered down below. I told him to collect all mail, correspondence, and confidential papers and to tell the captain to follow me; whereupon he replied: "We'll see to that."

Voyager took *Zingarella*—which was armed with two .303 machine-guns “not manned at any time”—into Salum and turned her over to *Terror*. “I consider,” remarked Morrow, “that the sergeant of the Queen’s Own acted in a most efficient and capable manner and with great presence of mind.” In the early hours of 1st January 1941 *Dainty*, on her first patrol with the squadron, captured *Tiberias* (237 tons) and *Maria Giovanna* (255 tons) and sent them into Salum with prize crews. At 4 a.m. on the 22nd of the month *Stuart* and *Vampire*, patrolling north of Tobruk to intercept the Italian cruiser *San Giorgio*⁴ should she attempt to leave there, met instead the schooner *Diego* bound for Benghazi with barrels of lubricating oil. She was searched and her total complement of eight removed, after which *Vampire* sank her by gun fire while *Stuart* provided cover.

IV

Military and air plans for the capture of Bardia were completed on the 31st December 1940, and called for naval cooperation in harassing fire and bombardments. *Voyager* and *Dainty* supported *Terror* and the gun-boats in a bombardment of the northern defence area on the 2nd January. At 7 a.m. the following day the two destroyers joined the screen of the battle fleet off Sidi Barrani, and *Warspite*, *Valiant* and *Barham* carried out a heavy bombardment as part of the actual assault on the fortress. The object of the operation was “to neutralize and harass the sector



north of the main Bardia-Tobruk road in which large concentrations of mechanical transport and tanks had been reported, and to prevent the formation of a counter-attacking force” while the army and air force attacked from the south and west. The bombardment, Cunningham later reported, succeeded in its principal object, for the morale effect of the

⁴ *San Giorgio*, Italian cruiser (1910), 9,232 tons, four 10-in guns, 22 kts; reduced to a wreck at Tobruk, Jun-Dec 1940.

fire sent the enemy to the ground at once. They stayed in their shelters to be taken prisoner when the troops arrived the day following.

By the 5th January Bardia was in British hands. *Stuart*, her refit in Malta completed, was now ready to rejoin the 10th Flotilla and, his ship again available, Waller was relieved as Senior Naval Officer, Inshore Squadron. He and his successor, Captain Hickling,⁵ left Alexandria in *Vendetta* on the 7th January and the following day entered Bardia in *Ladybird*. On the 10th *Stuart* reached Alexandria from Malta and the Australian destroyers, with the exception of *Waterhen* repairing at Port Tewfik, joined her there and Waller transferred to her from *Vendetta*. The following day the four ships sailed on the screen of *Barham* and *Eagle* for an operation in the Aegean.

Bardia was in full use as a subsidiary port to Salum by the 15th January, and on the 19th Cunningham reported to the Admiralty that in the last ten days the Inshore Squadron had ferried 35,000 Italian prisoners of war to Alexandria, besides supplying stores to Salum and Bardia at the rate of 500 tons daily; and that preparations were in hand for using the harbour at Tobruk as soon as possible after its capture. For the remainder of January and throughout February *Vendetta* was escorting convoys in the Aegean, but *Stuart*, *Vampire* and *Voyager* were back with the Inshore Squadron in time for the assault on Tobruk. In a two-day spell in Alexandria before they joined the squadron on the 21st January, *Stuart's* company made the acquaintance of the newly-formed Australian Forces Club established there by the Comforts Fund. "Within a few minutes of reaching the city we were sampling a glass of Australian beer. It was our first Australian liquor for fifteen months, and it was thoroughly appreciated," recorded a rating.

The 6th Australian Division, supported from the sea by *Terror*, *Gnat*, *Stuart*, *Vampire* and *Voyager*, broke into the outer defences of Tobruk at dawn on the 21st January, and before noon on the 22nd the town and harbour were in British hands. The port was in good condition with its services little impaired, and Rawlings recorded that:

Even the power station was working. Two distilling plants ashore were serviceable and there was a large stock of good water in the cisterns sufficient to meet the army's requirements for some considerable time. In short, if the Italians had omitted to festoon the town with banners inscribed with the welcome *Bene arrivati, O Inglesi*, it certainly must be conceded that they handed over the port of Tobruk as a going concern.

For over a week after its capture Tobruk was free from air attack. Work was pressed ahead to establish the port as the main supply base, a matter of urgency as on the 30th January General O'Connor stated that his plan was to advance rapidly on Benghazi. The success of the operation depended on supplies, and he asked for the supply of stores from Tobruk to a maximum. By the 5th February, on which date Captain

⁵ Vice-Adm H. Hickling, CB, CBE, DSO; RN. (HMS's *Glasgow* 1913-16, *Lowestoft* 1916-17.) Comd HMS's *Glasgow* 1940-42, *Raleigh* 1944; on planning staff for "Mulberry" artificial harbours for invasion of Normandy; NOIC "Mulberry B" Jun-Aug 1944. B. 17 Sep 1892.

Hickling was succeeded as S.N.O. Inshore Squadron by Captain Poland,⁶ Tobruk was handling 1,000 tons of stores daily; and at Derna, which the army entered on the 30th January, 150 tons of cased petrol was daily being off loaded.

The three Australian destroyers had a brief and unexpected break from squadron duties at this time. On the 6th February *Stuart* arrived from Alexandria off Tobruk in company with *Wryneck* during a particularly blind sand-storm. Waller anchored both ships by asdic and soundings. When they eventually entered port *Stuart* was ordered to return to Alexandria immediately. There, on the 7th February, *Stuart*, *Vampire* and *Voyager* were visited by Mr Menzies, then on his way to England from Australia. Ten years later, when again Prime Minister and addressing the Naval Cadets at Flinders Naval Depot on passing-out day from the college, Mr Menzies recalled that visit:

I inspected several naval ships in Alexandria harbour during 1941 with the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham. As we approached *Stuart*, Sir Andrew said to me: "And now you are going to meet one of the greatest captains who ever sailed the seas—his name is Waller."⁷

V

By now other factors had begun to shape events. German moves in the Balkans indicated the imminence of an attack on Greece and stimulated the offer of British aid to that country at the expense of operations in Libya. The Italian collapse in North Africa roused apprehension in the German High Command and caused Hitler to reconsider his decision not to send ground forces to the help of his ally there. On the 10th January 1941 Churchill told Wavell that nothing must hamper the capture of Tobruk, but that "thereafter all operations in Libya are subordinated to aiding Greece". Wavell conferred with the Greek Premier, General Metaxas, and the Commander-in-Chief, General Papagos, in Athens from the 13th to the 17th January, and offered British ground forces to help against possible German aggression. The offer was declined on the grounds that the landing of British forces in Greece would likely provoke German aggression without being strong enough to check it. The British Government thereupon modified its views regarding Libya, and decided to push on to Benghazi. The reaching of this decision coincided with one by Hitler—recorded by Assmann in his "Headline Diary" of the 18th January—to "try everything to prevent Italy's loss of North Africa".

Metaxas, the Greek Premier and "strong man" of that country, died on the 29th January. He was succeeded by M. Koryzis, Governor of the National Bank who, though a good administrator, had no political background and lacked strength in leadership. On the night of the 6th February Benghazi fell to the British. The following day the new Greek Government

⁶ Vice-Adm Sir Albert Poland, KBE, CB, DSO, DSC; RN. (HMS *New Zealand* 1913-17.) Comd HMS's *Black Swan* 1939-40, *Liverpool* 1940-41, *Jervis* and Capt (D) 14 Flotilla 1942-43; Cmdre (D) Eastern Fleet 1944-46. B. 18 Jun 1895.

⁷ Waller's son, Cadet-Midshipman J. C. Waller, was one of those who graduated from the College on this occasion.

asked Britain what help she could give to Greece in the event of a German attack. This change of Greek policy had immediate effects. The British War Cabinet told Wavell that no operations were to be undertaken beyond the frontier of Cyrenaica "which should be held with the minimum possible force necessary to secure the flank of our Egyptian base", and that the largest possible army and air forces must be sent from the Middle East to Greece.

The withdrawal of forces from Cyrenaica for transport to Greece began in February in the belief that there was not likely to be any serious threat to British positions in Cyrenaica before May at the earliest. But by early February, the landing of a German light armoured division at Tripoli had already begun. In the east, German aircraft from the Dodecanese dropped the first mines in the Suez Canal on the 30th January 1941. Incidentally the resultant blockage of the canal delayed the passage of *Waterhen* to the Mediterranean after completion of her repairs at Port Tewfik. In the west German aircraft made their appearance a few days later. Tobruk had its first raid on the 31st January, when three large monoplanes (Heinkels or S-79's) carried out attacks on ships in the harbour from about 300 feet. A second and heavier raid by about twelve aircraft, some of which mined the harbour and approaches, occurred at dawn on the 4th February. For some days from about the 12th February Tobruk was neglected by enemy aircraft, which concentrated their attacks on Benghazi.

With the capture of Benghazi, the work of the destroyers "to maintain the security of the sea communications between Alexandria and the advanced bases by escorting personnel and larger supply ships and by constant patrols of the sea routes" in cooperation with corvettes and minesweepers, intensified. Mines, including those dropped by aircraft, were an increasing menace. The destroyers sank numbers by rifle fire, and *Stuart's* 1st Lieutenant, Robison, offered a prize of two ounces of tobacco to the first man to report one. At 7 p.m. on the 11th February when patrolling off Tobruk, those on *Stuart's* bridge heard cries from the dark water, and picked up a stoker clinging to wreckage from the South African trawler *Southern Floe*,⁸ which had been mined at four o'clock that morning. In company with *Vampire* and *Voyager*, *Stuart* searched the area for four hours but found no more survivors. The following day the three destroyers formed part of the harbour clearance force sent to Benghazi. They arrived there in the darkness of the morning of the 13th, and from 5.30 to 6.45 a.m. watched a heavy air raid on the port, where anti-aircraft defences were hopelessly inadequate. To assist with the defences, *Terror*, escorted by *Stuart* and *Vampire*, reached Benghazi on the 17th.

In the inability of the army to provide anti-aircraft guns, the old monitor was the main defence of the port against air attack, but was unable to cope with the rising scale of the German onslaught. Because the army could not furnish anti-aircraft defences for both ports Cunningham refused

⁸ HMSAS *Southern Floe* (1936), 344 tons.

General Wilson's proposal to make Benghazi the main supply base instead of Tobruk, but agreed to run convoys there provided there was sufficient anti-aircraft protection available while ships were unloading. Two ships of the first convoy—all the port could handle at the time—reached Benghazi on the 18th February. But adequate anti-aircraft protection was not available, and the withdrawal of aircraft to reinforce Greece had left only one fighter squadron in western Cyrenaica.⁹ Enemy dive bombing attacks intensified, and it was decided to sail the two ships back to Tobruk. The convoy left Benghazi in the evening of the 19th February, and *Stuart*, hurrying from Tobruk to join the escort, of which *Voyager* also formed part, was dive-bombed and machine-gunned in four separate attacks by four Heinkel aircraft, but suffered only minor structural damage from near misses.

The air attacks on Benghazi reached their maximum on the 22nd February, when *Terror* suffered severe damage from a near miss, and her captain reported to Cunningham "I consider it only a matter of time before the ship receives a direct hit". She was sailed at dusk for Tobruk, in company with the corvette *Salvia*¹ and the minesweeper *Fareham*,² and Cunningham told Wavell and Longmore that "in view of the scale of air attack, inadequate defences, and damage to H.M.S. *Terror*, I have withdrawn H.M. Ships from Benghazi".

Terror did not reach Tobruk. Dive-bombed and mined leaving Benghazi, she was the victim of a final dive-bombing attack at 10.30 a.m. on the 23rd February off Derna. Her back was broken, and after a fruitless attempt to tow her she was abandoned and sunk. Her loss epitomised the situation that had arisen.

It stood for more than the end of a notable old veteran, and for more than the little ships which had been and were to be sunk, from just the same cause, whilst on their business of supplying the army and the air. It pointed to the fact that it was an enemy of a very different calibre whom we now had to face: an enemy who was not to be bluffed by A.A. defences that were "on the way", or who would not be turned from his purpose as the Italians had been turned. And the inability of the navy to use Benghazi was, in the not distant future, to mark more than the giving up of our most advanced supply base, for with it we were to lose, not only the control of Cyrenaica, but the possibility of opening up the Mediterranean routes in the spring of 1941. It suggested also the need to limit the employment of makeshift in combined operations today.³

During the period of occupation of Cyrenaica, and throughout the subsequent withdrawal operations, the Australian destroyers were mainly employed escorting troop convoys to Greece. Only one of the ships, *Waterhen*, was with the Inshore Squadron based on Tobruk from the 23rd February to the 5th March, when she too left to take part in the Aegean operations. Not until April were the ships back with the Inshore Squadron.

⁹ The necessity of providing adequate port defences was continually pressed on the army, but by this time "they, poor men, could do nothing, as most of their anti-aircraft guns were being withdrawn to be sent to Greece". Cunningham, p. 310.

¹ HMS *Salvia*, corvette (1940), 955 tons, one 4-in AA gun, 17 kts; sunk by U-boat off Egypt, 24 Dec 1941.

² HMS *Fareham*, minesweeper (1918), 710 tons, one 4-in gun, 16 kts.

³ Rawlings, "Narrative".

On the 24th February the 10th Flotilla suffered its first loss of a ship, when *Dainty* was sunk in an air attack off Tobruk.

By the 30th March it was apparent that the army would be forced to withdraw in Cyrenaica before strong enemy forces from Tripolitania. Plans for this eventuality had been outlined at a conference on the 21st March, when the navy's part was stated to be to make the port of Benghazi useless to the enemy in the case of withdrawal, to prevent the enemy using other small ports, and to maintain Tobruk. Demolitions were carried out, and the naval base party withdrawn from Benghazi on the 3rd April, and from Derna on the 7th. On the 10th began the defence of Tobruk, invested by the enemy. Withdrawal from Salum was effected on the 12th April, after successful demolitions.

Along the African coast the navy's main preoccupation now became supporting the army by bombarding enemy positions, and supplying Tobruk. Of the Australian destroyers *Stuart*, *Vendetta*, *Voyager* and *Waterhen* were thus employed during the first half of April. *Vendetta* and *Waterhen* left Alexandria for Tobruk on the 4th of the month, and until the 14th were based on Tobruk. Each night about 7 o'clock they left harbour to patrol, and returned around 6 a.m. next day. The days in harbour were a succession of air attacks, the destroyers, with steam on their main engines, swinging ship to bring their guns to bear. In the week from and including the 7th April, *Waterhen's* diarist recorded the daily daylight air attacks as twelve, fourteen, nine, thirteen, sixteen, six and, on the 13th: "harbour constantly attacked during the day." The following day, the 14th, was Easter Monday, *Waterhen's* "last day in Tobruk during the light hours". She and *Vendetta* returned from patrol at 6.15 a.m. to find the aerodrome under heavy attack by dive bombers. Both ships were attacked as they passed through the gate, but neither was damaged though bombs fell close. At 10.30 a.m. the hospital ships *Vita* and *Devonshire* entered the harbour. *Vita* embarked British and Australian wounded and sailed at 5 p.m. At 5.30 p.m., when leaving the swept channel, she was attacked by eight or ten dive bombers, near-missed, and severely damaged with the engine room flooded to sea level. *Waterhen* and *Vendetta* immediately sailed to her assistance, and the first-named took her in tow to an anchorage two miles outside the gate. Shortly after midnight, the tow having broken on a number of occasions, *Waterhen* proceeded alongside *Vita*, port side to, while *Vendetta* circled the two ships, and "*Vita's* 430 patients were transferred to the warship by the light of burning candles. Throughout these difficult operations the seamanship of H.M.A.S. *Waterhen* was, records the master of *Vita*, magnificent."⁴ By 1.50 a.m. on the 15th April embarkation was completed, and *Waterhen*, with *Vita's* wounded and medical staff, proceeded to Alexandria, where

⁴ H. St George Saunders, *Valiant Voyaging* (1948), pp. 53-4. *Waterhen's* record of those rescued is "432 wounded, 6 nursing sisters, 30 sick berth attendants, and 6 medical officers". Twelve months later, almost to the day, *Vita* was to repay this debt to the RAN when she rescued the survivors of HMAS *Vampire*, sunk by Japanese aircraft in the Bay of Bengal. (See Chapter 1 of Volume II of this history.)

she arrived at 5 p.m. With the departure of her consort, *Vendetta* carried out a sweep towards Derna.

Meanwhile units of the Inshore Squadron carried out bombardments, in one of which, at this period, *Stuart* took part. During the evening of the 13th, she and *Griffin* were detached from a force which had been sweeping the coast, met the gunboat *Gnat* shortly before 3 a.m. on the 14th, and went to Salum to support the army. On shore the enemy was pressing eastwards, and the extent of his advance was not known in the destroyers. At daylight on the 14th, Waller recorded, the two destroyers went in to Salum Bay to see which side was in possession:

At 6.3 a.m., at a range of about 5,000 yards, the question was quickly solved for me by several well-directed salvos from a field gun battery fired at the destroyers. Battery on the escarpment south of Salum. Destroyers replied and retired beyond battery's range. Then disposed destroyers on a bombardment course and line of bearing, firing at batteries meanwhile. 6.14 a.m. *Gnat* opened fire at town.

The destroyers bombarded effectively until 8.15 a.m. *Griffin* firing on transport on the winding road coming down to the town, while *Stuart* concentrated on an area behind the fort. They then withdrew to protect *Gnat* from air attack, and at 11 a.m. retired to Alexandria for fuel. *Gnat*, who was damaged by the fire of a mobile shore battery, proceeded to Mersa Matruh.

During the night of 16th-17th April *Vendetta*, patrolling to the westward with *Greyhound*, destroyed a schooner of some 300-400 tons, loaded with explosives, off Apollonia, some 40 miles west of Derna. Engaged with gun fire she was quickly ablaze, and within a few minutes blew up. On the 19th *Stuart*, *Voyager*, *Waterhen* and *Coventry* left Alexandria with *Glengyle*⁵ for a raid on Bardia. Number Seven Commando, with a small detachment of the Royal Tank Regiment, was landed from *Glengyle* soon after 10 p.m. on the 19th and carried out demolitions. No opposition was met, and the force sailed for Alexandria at 5 a.m. on the 20th, but sixty-seven commandos who lost their way on shore had to be left behind. The following month the regular "Tobruk Ferry Service" by destroyers of the Inshore Squadron was instituted, and was the main occupation of the original Australian destroyers for the remainder of their stay in the Mediterranean.

The Western Desert campaign emphasised once again the value to an army on land of command of the sea on its flank, especially in providing efficient and flexible lines of communication. Wavell, in his dispatch on the campaign, said:

The maintenance problem in this quick-moving operation over a distance of 500 miles would have been insurmountable without the navy's assistance in keeping open the sea supply lines and opening up of Salum, Bardia and Tobruk, thereby shortening the lines of communication and releasing motor transport for the vital task of stocking up successive field supply depots.

⁵ The "Glen" ships, *Glengyle*, *Glenearn*, and *Glenroy*, of the Glen Line, were modern merchant ships of 9,000 tons and a speed of 17 knots which had been converted into "landing ships infantry" (LSI) each equipped to transport and land one battalion on a hostile beach.

The campaign disclosed a weakness in interservice peacetime training, which had concentrated on the problem of assault from the sea and neglected the combined operational problem of supply and transportation by sea. This was the main problem in the desert campaign, and indeed in all Mediterranean operations. On the naval side the shortcomings were obvious in the lack of suitable ships for the carriage of specialised cargoes such as heavy lifts, water, and petrol; in the absence of any organisation for the taking over and running of an operational port as opposed to its defence; and in the inability to counter the enemy's preponderance in the new element of sea power—power in the air. These lacks were met so far as possible with improvisation, which is not a satisfactory substitute for preparation. Yet improvisation, backed by the resources of the human spirit which responded so well to the calls made upon it, could perhaps have sufficed to consolidate the victory gained. In a widening war with its growing threat to the Middle East, it was the dispersal of British strength caused by the decision to go to the aid of Greece which, at that juncture, robbed victory in Cyrenaica of its fruits.

CHAPTER 8

GREECE

IN discussing after the war the decision to send British troops to Greece in early 1941, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham said that the naval view at the time was that politically the decision was right, but it was doubted if the naval, military and air resources were equal to it.

No doubt our opinions were somewhat influenced by the fact that we were in possession of the Libyan coast as far west as Benghazi. From the Navy's point of view this facilitated the supply of Malta and the passage through the Sicilian Narrows, and conditions would be better still if the advance were continued towards Tripolitania.¹

The decision aggravated the immediate problem of supply and transportation by sea. Air Marshal Longmore, in his dispatch covering air operations from January to May 1941, instanced as a prominent feature the part played by the occupation of territory in adding to or reducing the potential scale of air attack on ships at sea. As a result of the decision to go to the aid of Greece, the Navy could only view with some concern the certainty of operations in the Aegean under air attack from the Dodecanese Islands, and the possibility of losing the advantage conferred by possession of the Libyan coast.

It was not, however, the British decision to aid Greece, but the German decision to aid Italy which was the main factor in shaping immediate events and which, while British successes in Libya were at their flood, seriously limited the power of the fleet in the central Mediterranean. Early in January, strong German air forces, mostly dive bombers and fighters, arrived in southern Italy and Sicily. In greater strength than available British air forces, far more efficient than the Italian, they nullified the effects of Taranto, temporarily denied the Central Mediterranean to the British fleet, and by reducing Malta's effectiveness strengthened the Axis communications with North Africa and made possible the rapid rebuilding of the army there with both Italian and German forces.

The British Navy had throughout regarded Malta as "the keystone of victory in the Mediterranean".² This view was not originally held by the army and air force, who considered that the island could not be held against continuous air attack from Sicily and possible invasion.³ Nor, from German reports after the war, was Malta's strategic importance at first realised by them or the Italians, with very few exceptions. But from the beginning of 1941 the influence it could exert in the Mediterranean generally and on the campaign in Cyrenaica in particular, was progressively appreciated by both sides.

¹ Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 315.

² Cunningham, p. 257.

³ As another "prominent feature" of operations in the Mediterranean from May 1940 to May 1941, Longmore instanced "the unexpected survival of Malta as an operational air base". As such it was essential to the Mediterranean Fleet in operations against enemy convoys to Libya.

The desirability of eliminating Malta as a threat to his communications was recognised by Hitler early in 1941 when he decided to send forces to North Africa, and on the 3rd February he told his military advisers that the island must be bombed incessantly. Twelve days later he expanded these ideas to include the possibility of occupying Malta, together with Corsica and the French Mediterranean coast, in case the British should continue their advance in North Africa and occupy Tripolitania. The German General Staff prepared an operational study dated 15th March, the operation to be almost entirely German, though a minor part was allotted to the Italian Navy. Events, however, did not favour the immediate prosecution of the plan. Developments in the Balkans and the Aegean (where German airborne troops it had been intended to use in the proposed attack on Malta were used, and suffered heavy losses, in the invasion of Crete) caused its postponement, and later plans for Malta's occupation in 1941 were also shelved.

The reduced scale of air attack on the island at this period, and the reinforcement of the Mediterranean Fleet, enabled the British to base surface forces on Malta for a few weeks during April and May, their task being to harry Axis communications with North Africa. *Jervis*, *Nubian*, *Mohawk* and *Janus* of Captain Mack's⁴ 14th Flotilla arrived there on 10th April. In the early hours of the 16th, on a fine clear night with a good moon, the flotilla intercepted and destroyed an enemy convoy of five merchant ships and three destroyers bound for Libya.⁵ Five days later the battle fleet bombarded the enemy's main African supply port, Tripoli. *Perth* took part in the operation, but not in the actual bombardment. Soon afterwards the 14th Flotilla was replaced at Malta by the 5th Flotilla, but during May this had to be withdrawn to reinforce the fleet, and Malta was again without surface forces.

The running of convoys to and from Malta was one of the reasons for a complex operation by Force "H" and the Mediterranean Fleet early in January. Another was the passage of a convoy through the Mediterranean from Gibraltar. The occasion was to be made one for offensive operations against the Dodecanese Islands and shipping on the Italian coasts.

Force "H", covering a convoy ("Excess") of four merchant ships, one, the *Essex* (11,063 tons), for Malta, and the remainder for Greece, left Gibraltar on the 7th January. The same day various coordinated movements began in the Eastern Mediterranean. The 3rd Cruiser Squadron (Rear-Admiral Renouf)—*Gloucester*, *Southampton*, and destroyers—sailed from the Aegean to meet Force "H" west of the Sicilian Narrows. A Malta convoy of two merchant ships escorted by *Calcutta*, *Diamond*, and *Defender*, left Alexandria. The 1st Division of the 7th Cruiser Squadron (Rear-Admiral Pridham-Wippell), *Orion* and *York* also sailed from

⁴ Rear-Adm P. J. Mack, DSO; RN. (HMS *Lord Nelson* 1914-16.) Comd HMS *Janus* 1940, HMS *Jervis* 1940-42, and Capt (D) 14 Flotilla 1940-42, HMS *King George V* and Flag Capt to C-in-C Home Fleet 1942-43; Rear-Adm Force "V" 1943. B. 6 Oct 1892. Killed in aircraft accident, 29 Apr 1943.

⁵ *Mohawk* was torpedoed and sunk during this encounter.

Alexandria, and *Ajax* and *Perth* left Piraeus to join them at Suda Bay. The Australian cruiser was shaking down as a unit of the 7th Squadron, of which she and *Ajax* formed the Second Division. The two ships had been patrolling in the western Aegean since the 1st of the month. The battle fleet (Cunningham), *Warspite*, *Valiant*, *Illustrious*, and destroyers, sailed from Alexandria to the westward, providing general cover. By mid-morning on the 9th Cunningham was midway between Greece and Malta, where he was joined by Pridham-Wippell's force. (Here, for a few hours, *Sydney* and *Stuart* were also in company on their way from Malta to Alexandria, as recounted in Chapter 5.) In the afternoon the 7th Cruiser Squadron was detached to cover the convoys arriving at and leaving Malta. The 3rd Cruiser Squadron was well ahead through the Sicilian Narrows, meeting Force "H" to the west of Sicily. So far all had gone according to plan.

After dark on the 9th, Force "H" handed "Excess" over to the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, which was joined by the cruiser *Bonaventure*,⁶ come with Force "H" from the west to join the Mediterranean Fleet. The eastward passage of the Narrows began. Early on the morning of the 10th, off Pantelleria, two enemy destroyers were sighted by *Bonaventure*, and in a sharp dawn action one was sunk. By daylight the battle fleet was on the scene, and it was as the destroyers were taking station when the battle fleet turned after the convoy, that the first of a series of blows fell. The destroyer *Gallant* struck a mine and had her bows blown off. The stern portion was taken in tow and escorted to Malta under cover of the 3rd Cruiser Squadron and *Bonaventure*.

Meanwhile the Alexandria convoy had reached Malta safely, and the east bound convoys had sailed from the island, while "Excess", covered by the battle fleet, was approaching from the westward. Shortly after noon, large formations of aircraft were sighted. They were German, and "a very heavy, determined and skilful dive bombing attack developed on the fleet, mainly directed at *Illustrious*, and lasting for some ten minutes". That ten minutes sufficed to change the whole naval situation in the Central Mediterranean. *Illustrious* was hit by six heavy bombs, and hauled out of line heavily on fire and with her steering gear out of action. She fought back hard with her armament, and despite a second dive bombing attack four hours later, reached Malta, steered by her main engines, at 9.45 p.m., an hour after *Essex*, which had been detached from "Excess". Little damage was done to the rest of the battle fleet, which throughout the 11th steered eastwards in close support of "Excess". That afternoon, however, the German dive bombers had a further success. In an attack on the 3rd Cruiser Squadron returning to join the battle fleet after covering *Gallant* to Malta, they hit *Gloucester* and *Southampton*, the last-named badly. *Orion* and *Perth*, at this time on the battle fleet anti-aircraft screen, were detached to close the damaged ships. They reached them at 9 p.m., and found *Southampton* stopped and so heavily

⁶ HMS *Bonaventure*, cruiser (1940), 5,450 tons, ten 5.25-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 33 kts; sunk south of Crete, 31 Mar 1941.

on fire that she had to be abandoned. Her survivors were embarked by *Gloucester* and *Diamond*, and at 10 p.m. she was sunk by torpedoes from *Orion*.

The operation was successful in that all convoys arrived safely. But the major damage to *Illustrious* deprived the fleet of its air cover, and restricted its activities. In the lack of fighters as defence against dive bombing, the fleet could not operate in the Central Mediterranean, and until *Illustrious* was replaced no supply convoys could be run to Malta. As an immediate result, the intended air strikes against Italian shipping were cancelled. The 1st Battle Squadron, *Barham* and *Eagle*, screened by the 10th Flotilla, sailed from Alexandria on the 11th January to launch air strikes against the Dodecanese, but bad weather made flying impossible and the force returned to Alexandria on the 17th.

Illustrious reached the Egyptian base eight days later, after suffering heavy dive bombing attacks while effecting temporary repairs at Malta. *Perth* had some experience of the intensity of those attacks. With *Orion*, she reached Malta on the 14th January from Piraeus, with military passengers. To reduce the concentration of ships at Malta, *Orion* and *Bonaventure* (the last-named ship had reached Malta with *Gallant* on the 11th) were sailed on the 14th. *Perth* had to remain to effect boiler repairs, and was berthed alongside with *Illustrious* opposite her and *Essex* close astern, with 4,000 tons of ammunition in her holds. The dockyard was subjected to a particularly determined attack on the afternoon of the 16th January. According to *Perth*, the first attack was by six bombers which released their bombs from about 4,000 feet, and scored a direct hit on *Essex*. In a second attack about twenty minutes later, pressed home with great determination by some twenty dive bombers, *Illustrious* received a direct hit on the port quarter, and other bombs fell on shore and in the water near the ships. One landed between *Perth's* side and the dock wall abreast the after turret, and exploded under water. The ship was violently shaken, and sustained underwater and internal damage, but no casualties. The bomb which hit *Essex* exploded in and wrecked the engine room, caused many casualties, and set the ship on fire. Good work was done by fire and medical parties from *Perth*, who were sent on board immediately, while hoses were run from *Perth's* fire main to supplement the dockyard hoses playing from the outside. Serious at first, the fire was successfully extinguished, and what might have been a disastrous explosion was averted. *Perth*, on orders from the Vice-Admiral, Malta, was sailed that night for Alexandria, where she arrived on the 18th.

Malta dockyard did great work repairing *Illustrious*. Further heavy raids were experienced on the 18th and 19th, when that ship and *Essex* were again damaged, as was *Decoy*, which was there refitting. In all, Malta was raided fifty-eight times during January. The attackers also suffered losses, and it was estimated at the time that between the 10th and the 19th of the month, 150 enemy aircraft were destroyed or damaged over the island by anti-aircraft fire and fighters. *Illustrious* was sufficiently repaired to enable her to sail on the night of the 23rd January. The day previously,



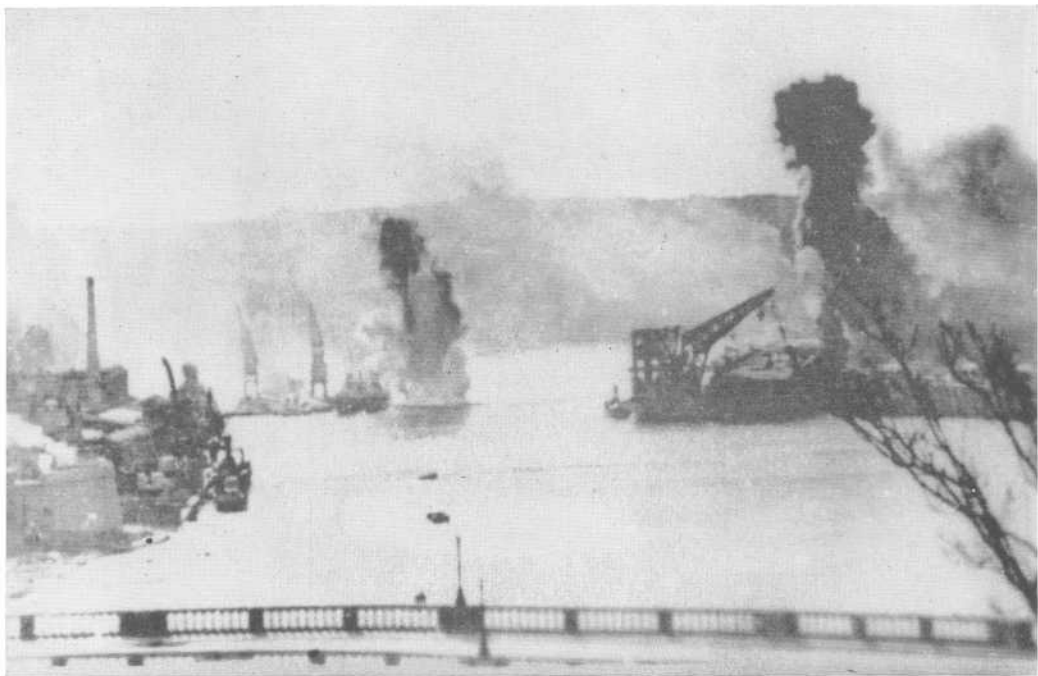
Survivors from Nauru
Island in Steamship
Nellore.

Damage by German
Raiders' Gunfire at
Nauru, 27th December
1940.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



(R.A.N. Historical Section)



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

German Air Attack on H.M.S. *Illustrious* and H.M.A.S. *Perth* in Malta Grand Harbour,
16th January 1941.



(Department of Information)

H.M.A.S. *Perth* on Patrol off Crete, January 1941.

Perth, in company with *Barham*, *Valiant*, and destroyers, sailed from Alexandria. The force met *Illustrious* to the west of Crete, and covered her passage to Alexandria, where she arrived on the 25th. *Perth*, on the afternoon of that day, was detached from the covering force to Suda Bay.

II

After the British occupation of Crete, Cunningham, in November 1940, suggested to the First Sea Lord the possibility of taking the Dodecanese Islands. He returned to this suggestion the following month as an alternative to a proposal by Mr Churchill to capture Pantelleria in the Central Mediterranean. This proposal, which Cunningham considered "a wild-cat scheme" at which he was "frankly aghast", was in Churchill's opinion "cardinal". To carry out the operation it was proposed to use commando troops in the specially-equipped landing ships *Glennearn*, *Glengyle*, and *Glenroy*. These ships did not reach the Mediterranean, via the Cape, until March, too late, in the turn of events, either for an attack on Pantelleria or the alternative assault on Rhodes in the Dodecanese, which proposal had meanwhile been adopted by London.

Before then, however, an unsuccessful minor operation against the Dodecanese was carried out. On the 23rd February 1941, the destroyers *Hereward* and *Decoy* at Suda Bay embarked commandos who had for some time been in Crete. With *Gloucester* and *Bonaventure* of the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, and the gunboat *Ladybird*, an assault on the easternmost island, Castellorizo, was made at dawn on the 25th. The commandos were landed in the destroyers' boats and occupied the island, and marines were put ashore from *Ladybird*. At this stage, the Italians on the main island of Rhodes reacted with unexpected vigour and enterprise. They bombed Castellorizo heavily between 8 and 9.30 a.m. *Ladybird* was slightly damaged, re-embarked the marines, and withdrew to Cyprus. Here it had been intended to embark a permanent garrison in the armed boarding vessel *Rosaura*;⁷ but in view of the enemy activity the troops were taken instead to Alexandria and embarked there in *Decoy* and *Hero*.

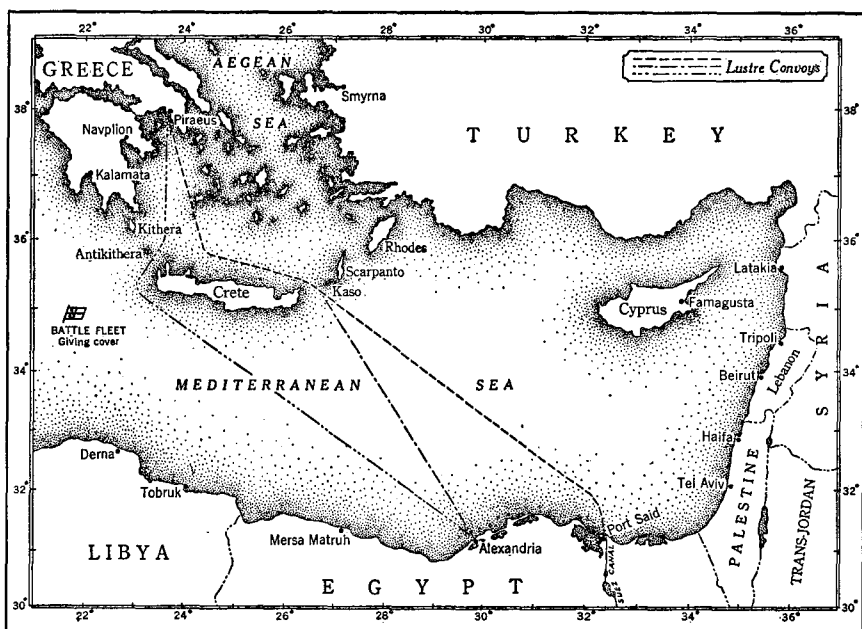
Perth was in Alexandria at the time. She spent most of the last days of January and the first week of February based on Suda Bay and patrolling in the western Aegean, and reached Alexandria early in the morning of the 7th February. On that day, with the Australian destroyers, she was inspected by the Australian Prime Minister, Mr Menzies, and thereafter until the 23rd she remained in port, docking and repairing damage sustained at Malta. On the 24th, with *Nubian* and *Mohawk*, she went to the assistance of *Terror* after that ship was bombed leaving Benghazi, but returned to port on learning that the monitor had sunk. She sailed again from Alexandria on the 27th, and with *Bonaventure* covered the landing on Castellorizo of the troops from *Decoy* and *Hero*. They were put ashore on the night of the 27th-28th. The enemy, however, had also effected landings, and continued heavy air attacks on the

⁷ HMS *Rosaura*, armed boarding vessel (1905), 1,552 tons; sunk by mine off Tobruk, 18 Mar 1941.

island and British forces. As a result the commandos and garrison were withdrawn from the island a few hours later. Not until 1943 were landing operations again carried out in the Dodecanese. Meanwhile they remained a serious and harmful menace to British operations in the Aegean.

III

On the day of the withdrawal of the troops from Castellorizo, Cunningham issued operation orders for "Lustre", the movement of troops from Egypt to Greece. The operation entailed the transport of 58,364 troops; 8,588 items of motor transport, guns and tanks; and stores and equipment in a series of convoys. To carry troops through the Dodecanese danger



zone as quickly as possible it was decided to transport a proportion of them in cruisers of the 3rd and 7th Squadrons. In the event this became a necessity, as mining of the Suez Canal prevented sufficient troopships being available.

Since the Italian invasion of Greece, convoys—"AN" northbound and "AS" southbound—had run regularly between that country and Egypt. The military transport and store ships of "Lustre" were now included in these convoys, which were sailed at more frequent intervals and had special fast convoys—"ANF" and "ASF"—added to their number. Thus the first "Lustre" convoy, which left Egypt on the 4th March, was "AN.17". In addition convoys of special troop carriers, including the cruisers, were instituted and designated "AG" northbound and "GA"

southbound. "AG.1", comprising the cruisers *York*, *Bonaventure* and *Gloucester*, left Alexandria on the 6th and reached Piraeus on the 7th March, a day ahead of "AN.17". In a total of twelve "AG" convoys, 45,793 troops were carried, 11,000 of them in cruisers; while 12,571 made the passage in the transport and store ships of the "AN" and "ANF" convoys. With its existing commitments on the Libyan coast, the scale of escort for "Lustre"—an average of three destroyers for each "AG-GA" convoy and two for each "AN-AS", with anti-aircraft cruisers during the more dangerous parts of the passage—imposed a heavy burden on the fleet. In addition, cruisers were employed giving close cover in the Aegean, and during the greater part of the operation a proportion of the battle fleet was kept at sea to the west of Crete to provide heavy cover against possible Italian surface attack. For the first six days of the movement, convoys sailed from Egypt for Greece every day, in some instances two leaving on the same date. Thereafter until the last sailing on the 21st April, sailings averaged one every two or three days. The operation was successful. Although some ships were sunk and others damaged, no troops or equipment were lost at sea.⁸ The losses sustained were either in ships proceeding in the convoys but not connected with "Lustre", or in ships returning empty from Greece.

The third "AG" convoy was of three cruisers, *Perth*, *Orion*, and *Ajax* of the 7th Squadron, and sailed from Alexandria on the 7th March. *Perth* embarked 609 other ranks and 58 officers, mostly British troops but including 89 of the 3rd Australian Casualty Clearing Station. The British officers, some of whom were in the opinion of the sailors "extremely helpless", did not travel light, and *Perth* found

the amount of officers' baggage was a distinct embarrassment, as included among the allowance(!) of one valise and one suitcase were wardrobe trunks, wireless sets, large heavy suitcases and four dogs.

The three cruisers made the passage from Alexandria to Piraeus via Kaso Strait at 26 knots in ideal weather. There was no enemy interference, and *Perth* secured alongside at Piraeus at noon on the 8th. On the 17th March the three ships again left Alexandria with troops. This time *Perth* carried a total of 554 officers and men, mostly New Zealanders. These troops had few small kitbags, and carried blankets and landing rations, cookers, Bren guns and stands.

Piraeus was reached at noon on the 18th, and disembarkation to the music of the ship's band commenced at 12.45.

All the Australian destroyers were at some time or other engaged in escorting "Lustre" convoys. *Stuart*, with *Coventry*, *Hereward* and *Hyacinth*,⁹ was on the screen of the first convoy, "AN.17", which left Egypt on the 4th March. Between 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. on the 6th it was

⁸ Though none was actually "lost at sea", 7 soldiers were killed and 14 injured in S.S. *Devts* (6,054 tons) when she was bombed in convoy ANF.24.

⁹ HMS *Hyacinth*, corvette, 925 tons, one 4-in AA gun, 17 kts.

seven times attacked by aircraft. *Stuart* was near-missed in the final attack, and Waller wrote:

This last aircraft seemed to be out for my blood and nursed his second bomb until I remained on a steady course. The bombs being so large, however, they could be followed all the way down and the requisite alteration could be made.

The convoy was again attacked by a torpedo bomber the next morning, but reached Piraeus unharmed on the 8th.

Vendetta followed *Stuart*. After a month refitting at Alexandria, she sailed on the 11th March as one of the escort of "AN.19". *Vampire*, which made the southward run with "GA.2", made her initial northward passage with convoy "AG.5", which left Egypt on the 12th March; and two days later *Waterhen* left Piraeus with a southbound convoy, "AS.19". The convoy reached Alexandria on the 17th, and the following day *Waterhen* sailed again as one of the escort of "AN.21", which included thirteen "Lustre" ships. On the 21st of March, as the convoy was passing through Kithera Channel in squally, rainy weather, it was attacked at 4 p.m. by four aircraft which appeared from low cloud. A "Lustre" ship, the Danish tanker *Marie Maersk* (8,271 tons), was hit on the bridge, suffered heavy casualties, and was set on fire, and abandoned. *Waterhen* closed her, picked up thirty-two survivors, and sent a volunteer salvage party of nine ratings¹⁰ and the tanker's second engineer, Mr A. Rasmussen, over to the damaged ship under Lieutenant Hill.¹ Shortly afterwards the armed trawler *Amber* arrived, and *Waterhen* was ordered to rejoin the convoy, which she did, leaving the salvage party in the tanker after Hill had reported that there were good prospects of getting the vessel into harbour "providing I had someone to lead me, there being no compass left".

On boarding *Marie Maersk* at 5.30 p.m. on the 21st, Hill found the whole of the bridge section on fire, the deck plating blown up abaft the bridge, and the oil in the tank below burning fiercely. Hoses were rigged and the fire tackled; Rasmussen got the engines working; and at 8.45 p.m. they were put to full ahead. The electric steering gear then failed, and steering was done throughout the night by the engines, the ship making good four knots. By midnight the fires were under control, and by daylight on the 22nd Able Seaman Haydock² had managed to rig the hand steering gear, after which *Marie Maersk* was able to steam at full speed with *Amber* as guide. "We all greatly appreciated seeing one of our own fighters overhead," reported Hill, "with everything so satisfactory on board." *Marie Maersk* entered Suda Bay at noon on the 22nd, and Hill anchored her in the inner harbour. The fires were finally extinguished at 6 p.m., and some 500 tons only of the oil cargo was lost.

¹⁰ Ldg Seaman R. E. Smyth; AB's J. B. Parks, C. A. Wood, G. S. Smith and E. J. Haydock; OD C. L. Rigby; Sig L. J. Palmer; Stokers H. G. Bahr and H. J. Mahoney. (Parks was taken prisoner after sinking of HMAS *Perth* and lost in sinking of Japanese transport, *Rakuyo Maru*, on 12 Sep 1944.)

¹ Lt-Cdr C. G. Hill, MBE; RANR(S). HMAS's *Waterhen* 1939-41, *Stuart* 1941, *Geelong* 1942-44; comd HMAS *Barcoo* 1944-45. Of Bellevue Hill, NSW; b. Sydney 21 Jul 1904.

² AB E. J. Haydock, W896, RANR. HMAS's *Waterhen* 1939-41, *Stuart* 1941. Plumber; of Maryborough, Vic; b. Pontypool, Wales, 2 Jun 1915.

Stuart, after her experience with "AN.17", was escort to two more "Lustre" convoys, and on the 19th March sailed from Piraeus with *Perth* and the 7th Cruiser Squadron on Aegean patrol. On the 21st the ships, joined by those of the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, sailed from Suda Bay and joined the battle fleet for operation MC.9, the passage of a convoy of four store ships from Alexandria to Malta. On the 10th March the armoured aircraft carrier *Formidable*³ had replaced *Illustrious* with the fleet, and with air cover regained such essays into the Central Mediterranean were again possible. On the successful conclusion of the operation, *Stuart* went to Alexandria with the fleet, and *Perth* resumed convoy cover work in the Aegean.

IV

At this stage there was a slight and temporary check to the flow of the convoys. From the 25th March there was marked increase of Italian air reconnaissance to the south and west of Greece and Crete, and over Alexandria. Impending action on the enemy's part was indicated, possibly against the convoys, then the most vulnerable point for the British. Cunningham's problem was so to dispose his forces to meet this threat as not unduly to interfere with the convoy program, nor to cause the enemy to defer his intended operation. To take the fleet to sea the Aegean covering forces and "Lustre" close escort forces, already sparse, had to be drawn upon; and the situation was complicated by the disablement of the heavy cruiser *York* which, hit by an explosive Italian motor-boat in Suda Bay on the 26th March, subsequently became a total loss there from successive air attacks. Should the Italians become aware that the fleet was at sea, they could defer their operation and maintain a state of suspense which would impose an increased strain on the covering and escort forces.

On the 26th March the battle fleet was at Alexandria. *Orion*, *Ajax* and *Perth* of the 7th, and *Gloucester* of the 3rd Cruiser Squadrons, with the destroyers *Ilex*, *Hasty*, *Hereward* and *Vendetta*, now constituting the 2nd Flotilla, were in the Aegean under Pridham-Wippell in *Orion*. Only one convoy, "AG.9", which left Egypt on the 26th, was at sea. A southbound convoy, "GA.8", was due to leave Piraeus on the 27th. As Italian action appeared imminent, Cunningham decided to clear the threatened area. Convoy "GA.8" was held at Piraeus, and "AG.9" was ordered to maintain its northward course until nightfall of the 27th, and then reverse course towards Alexandria. The Royal Air Force was asked for fullest possible cooperation with reconnaissance and bomber aircraft in the Aegean and to the west of Crete, and the Fleet Air Arm in Crete stood by with torpedo aircraft and fighters. Pridham-Wippell was instructed to be to the southward of Gavdhos Island (south of Crete) at daylight on the 28th March, and his force sailed from Suda Bay in the early afternoon of the 27th.

The Italian fleet had also left its bases, under the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Angelo Iachino, in the battleship *Vittorio Veneto*, and—as was

³ HMS *Formidable*, aircraft carrier (1940), 23,000 tons, sixteen 4.5-in guns, over 60 aircraft, 31 kts.

later learned—was steaming eastwards in three separated groups, two squadrons of cruisers, and the battleship with a destroyer screen. The cruiser squadrons were to operate north and south of Crete against the convoys. According to Vice-Admiral Weichold, the German admiral in Rome, this operation was undertaken as a result of German pressure, and of a report by the German air force on the 16th March that two British battleships had been hit by torpedoes in an attack by German torpedo bombers, this being “a very important fact affecting the relative strengths of the naval forces”. Subsequent Italian reports, however, discount Weichold’s claim.⁴ The cooperation of the German air force in reconnaissance, fighter protection and engagements was assured.

The first report of the Italians was of a sighting by a flying-boat of No. 230 Squadron from Malta of a force of three cruisers and a destroyer 80 miles east of the south-eastern corner of Sicily, steering south-east; and was received by Cunningham in Alexandria at noon on the 27th. At that hour, and again later in the afternoon, Italian air reconnaissance was carried out over the Egyptian base. At dusk, when its departure would not be seen, Cunningham sailed the fleet, flying his flag in *Warspite*, with *Barham*, *Valiant* and *Formidable*; the destroyers of the 14th Flotilla, *Jervis*, *Janus*, *Nubian* and *Mohawk*, under Captain Mack in *Jervis*; and *Greyhound*, *Griffin*, *Hotspur* and *Havock* under Captain Waller (D.10) in *Stuart*. Course and speed were set to rendezvous with Pridham-Wippell south of the western end of Crete at 5 p.m. on the 28th.

Just before 8 a.m. on that date an aircraft from *Formidable* reported four cruisers and six destroyers about thirty miles south of Gavdhos Island, steering S.S.E. This was roughly the position of Pridham-Wippell’s force, and both in that force itself and in *Warspite*, the report was at first thought to refer inaccurately to it; but half an hour later Pridham-Wippell’s sighting report of three cruisers and destroyers to the northward of him was received in the flagship. At about the time the *Formidable*’s aircraft sighted the Italian force, German aircraft from the Aegean sighted the British battle fleet and reported one aircraft carrier, two battleships, nine cruisers and fourteen destroyers. Iachino received the report at 9 a.m. but he convinced himself that the aircraft report referred to his own fleet, and informed Rhodes accordingly.

When sighted by Pridham-Wippell, the enemy cruisers were steering S.S.E. on a slightly converging course on his port quarter. They were identified as 8-inch gun ships (subsequently learned to be *Trento*, *Trieste*⁵ and *Bolzano*). As they had superiority in speed, range and gun power, Pridham-Wippell, steaming in line ahead in the order *Orion*, *Ajax*, *Perth* and *Gloucester*, tried to lead them back to the approaching battle fleet.

⁴ Weichold, Essay, 1945. In a statement in November 1952 the Italian Historical Division said that owing to the known unreliability of news of this kind, and on account of the results of reconnaissance carried out on 17, 18 and 19 March 1941 not tending to confirm the news (on which procedure the German command insisted), both the Italian Ministry of Marine and Admiral Iachino were confirmed in their opinion of its unreliability. Thus though the Italian authorities were in possession of the German air force report, the project and execution of the operation did not undergo any modification on that account.

⁵ *Trieste*, Italian cruiser (1930), 10,000 tons, eight 8-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 35 kts; sunk by American aircraft, 10 Apr 1943.

The Italians opened fire at 8.12 a.m. at a range of nearly thirteen miles, and concentrated with some accuracy on *Gloucester*, who "snaked the line" to avoid hits. At 8.29, when the range had closed by a mile or so, *Gloucester* opened fire, but her three salvos fell short. The enemy hauled away to S.E. by E., after which, although he resumed the more southerly course and continued to fire, his own salvos fell short. At 8.55 a.m. the Italians ceased fire and turned away to the northward, eventually steadying on a north-west by westerly course. Pridham-Wippell followed round to try to keep touch. At this stage, *Vendetta*, which had engine trouble, was ordered to join the battle fleet. She did so, and Cunningham ordered her back to Alexandria.

The battle fleet, pushing along at 22 knots, was suffering delay from the necessity of *Formidable* turning in to a following wind to fly off aircraft, and *Valiant* was ordered on ahead to support the cruisers. Reports reaching the flagship from aircraft gave a confusing picture. They included those of another enemy force to the northward of the Italian force, "battleships" being mentioned on one occasion; but it was not clear to Cunningham whether this was actually another force, or either of those already in touch with each other. Subsequently the aircraft lost this northerly group, and, no further reports of it having reached *Warspite* by 10.30 a.m., it seemed possible that the force sighted by Pridham-Wippell was the only enemy squadron in the vicinity. Shortly before 11 a.m., however, the staff in *Warspite* were electrified by the interception of three emergency signals made by Pridham-Wippell to his cruisers: "Make smoke by all available means," "Turn together to 180 degrees," "Proceed at your utmost speed." They told Cunningham, before the amplifying report reached him, that Pridham-Wippell had sighted the enemy battle fleet.

In his initial report of this new enemy, received by Cunningham at 10.58, Pridham-Wippell reported two battleships. Actually there was one, *Vittorio Veneto*, with destroyers, sixteen miles to the north of the British force and steering S.S.E. Iachino, like Cunningham, had an incomplete picture at this stage. He knew of his own three groups, and the position, course and speed of Pridham-Wippell's squadron. He did not know that the British battle fleet was at sea, and that the northerly Italian group, which consisted not of battleships but of the three 8-inch gun cruisers *Zara*, *Pola*, and *Fiume*,⁶ the two 6-inch gun cruisers *Garibaldi* and *Abruzzi*,⁷ and destroyers, was at the outset in a position to cut Pridham-Wippell off from Cunningham. On the facts known to him he used his southern squadron to draw Pridham-Wippell within range of his flagship. At the same time the northern force, which had been steering south-west, also altered course to west.

At 11 a.m. Cunningham was some 70 miles from Pridham-Wippell. The British cruisers, speeding southwards at 31 knots and making smoke,

⁶ *Zara*, *Pola* and *Fiume*, Italian cruisers (1931-32), 10,000 tons, eight 8-in guns, 32 kts; sunk off Cape Matapan, 28-29 Mar 1941.

⁷ *Garibaldi* and *Abruzzi*, Italian cruisers (1937), 7,874 tons, ten 6-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 35 kts.

pursued by the battleship at about the same speed, came under immediate and accurate fire, and during the next half hour both *Orion* and *Gloucester* were straddled by 15-inch salvos, the last-named repeatedly. In *Warspite*, Cunningham's hand was forced by the need rapidly to support the cruisers in their dangerous situation. He was anxious to conceal his presence and if possible work round the Italians so that they could not, with their superior speed, evade a fleet action. In the circumstances, however, he ordered *Formidable* to launch a force of aircraft against *Vittorio Veneto*. The attack was delivered, with one probable torpedo hit reported, at 11.27 a.m.⁸ Iachino, now aware that a British carrier was about, immediately broke off the action and turned to the north-west. The cruisers thereupon ceased making smoke, and when the horizon was clear at 11.48, no enemy was in sight. Pridham-Wippell steered eastward to gain touch with the battle fleet, which was done at 12.30. The British then settled down to a chase, with the cruisers ahead at maximum visual signal range from the fleet, which was making about 22 knots.

Throughout the afternoon the situation, as seen in *Warspite*, was still confused. Reports of a northern Italian force of battleships and heavy cruisers continued to arrive. *Vittorio Veneto* was not again sighted until 3.15 p.m., when an aircraft from *Formidable* reported her, in company with four destroyers, sixty-five miles W.N.W. of *Warspite*. A second air striking force attacked with torpedoes, and reported three hits, and that the battleship's speed was reduced to eight knots.¹ During the afternoon Fleet Air Arm torpedo bombers from Maleme, in Crete, and R.A.F. bombers from Greece, also attacked the enemy cruiser squadrons, but scored no hits. It soon became apparent that the reported speed reduction of *Vittorio Veneto* was optimistic. Although damaged, she was making a good 12 to 15 knots and would not be overhauled before dark. Pridham-Wippell was ordered to press on and gain touch. Cunningham's intentions then were to send the destroyers in to attack if contact were established; but if the cruisers failed to gain touch he would work round to the north and west and regain touch in the morning.

By 7.15 p.m., consequent upon expert observers' reports from *Warspite's* aircraft, Cunningham had a clearer view of the situation. The Italian forces had concentrated in support of *Vittorio Veneto*, and were proceeding W.N.W. in five columns at 15 knots, about forty-five miles from *Warspite*. The battleship was in the centre, with four destroyers screening ahead and two astern; in the inner port column were *Trento*, *Trieste* and *Bolzano*; in the inner starboard column *Zara*, *Pola* and *Fiume* of the northern group. There were three destroyers in the port and two in the starboard outer columns. A force of battleships and heavy cruisers still being reported to the north-westward of this main fleet was, as subsequently learned, apparently *Garibaldi*, *Abruzzi*, and destroyers of the northern group. By 7.25 p.m. Pridham-Wippell was in radar and visual touch with some

⁸ No hit occurred.

¹ One hit was obtained. The battleship reduced speed to 17 knots but about four hours later increased to 19 knots.

of the enemy, and between 7.35 and 7.45 saw, twelve miles away, the sky "filled with streams of tracer ammunition of various colours" as the Italians fought off a torpedo bomber attack by *Formidable* aircraft.

At this stage Cunningham had to decide whether he "would be justified in taking the fleet at night through a screening force of at least six cruisers and eleven destroyers, with another force of two battleships, three cruisers and five destroyers in the vicinity". The alternative was to let the Italians escape, or face very heavy air attack farther to the westward if intercepting at dawn the following day. He decided to accept a night action, and at 8.40 p.m., keeping a skeleton screen of four ships of the 10th Flotilla—*Stuart* and *Havock* to starboard and *Greyhound* and *Griffin* to port, jestingly classified by his staff as the old, the halt, the maimed and the blind—ordered the rest of the destroyers, both 14th and 2nd Flotillas, to attack. "As the executive signal was made," *Hotspur's* 1st Lieutenant later wrote, "the great arc of the destroyer screen faded and became shapeless as each destroyer foamed up to 30 knots and, turning and twisting like snipe, they fell into single lines astern of their leaders."²

The groups of ships moved on westwards over a calm sea, through a clear, dark night. In *Warspite* Cunningham and his staff, in order to see better, moved from the Admiral's bridge up to the compass platform which, with the ship's own officers there, was uncomfortably crowded. Close ahead of her those on *Stuart's* bridge could hear the crews of the destroyer's "A" and "B" guns talking in low tones and singing softly. Farther ahead, the destroyer striking force led by Mack in *Jervis*, was pressing ahead with the object of passing to the northward of the enemy and attacking from the van. Close astern of the Italians, who in *Warspite* were estimated to be 33 miles from the battle fleet and steering W.N.W. at 13 knots, Pridham-Wippell was trying to regain visual touch with the enemy, which had been lost subsequent to the air attack at 7.45.

The result of that attack largely directed the course of the night action. The cruiser *Pola* was torpedoed in the engine room, and left stopped. Iachino altered course to the southward, to S.W.³—which alteration was reported by *Warspite's* aircraft—but after about half an hour altered again to the northward, to N.W. by N. This northerly alteration, unobserved by the British, took him across the W. by N. line of advance of Mack's striking force almost an hour before the destroyers reached the intersection point, so that they continued unsuccessfully searching for him to the westward. Pridham-Wippell anticipated that the Italians would turn northwards for Messina, and himself steered northwards, but more northerly than Iachino. Pridham-Wippell was hampered in his search in that a series of circumstances, not least of which was his desire to avoid running foul of Mack's destroyers in the darkness, prevented him from

² Hugh Hodgkinson, *Before the Tide Turned* (1944), p. 69. Lt-Cdr R. H. Hodgkinson, DSC; RN. HMS's *Harvester* 1940, *Hotspur* 1940-41, *Sphinx* 1941, *Nile* 1941-42, *King Alfred* 1942-43; comd HMS's *Pythchley* 1943-44, *Wizard* 1945. B. 30 Jan 1912.

³ This was a temporary manoeuvre due to the air attack. The Italian Fleet in fact continued on a westerly course at 16 knots until 7.45 p.m. when speed was increased to 19 knots. At 8.48 p.m. Iachino shaped course for Taranto.

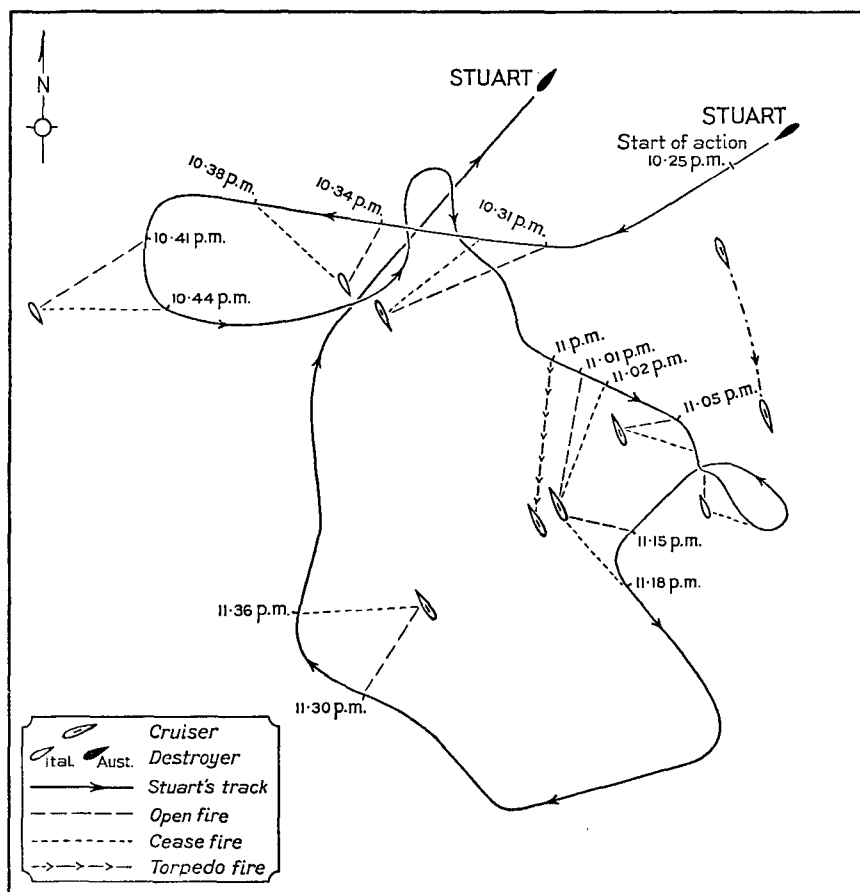
spreading his cruisers, and he continued in a concentrated group. Iachino's line of advance thus took him between the destroyers to the south and the cruisers to the east on a course from which his seekers were diverging on either side. By this time the Italian admiral knew that the British battle fleet was at sea, but believed that it was 90 miles astern of him instead of being less than half that distance, and at 9.30 p.m., while Mack was still some miles to the southward and eastward of him, he detached *Zara* and *Fiume* and four destroyers from his screen, and sent them back to find the damaged *Pola*.

More than an hour earlier this ship had been located, stopped or proceeding very slowly, by Pridham-Wippell, who at 8.15 p.m. picked her up by radar six miles distant. She was not sighted, but because of her size Pridham-Wippell thought she might be *Vittorio Veneto*. He argued that, if so, she was "fixed" for the battle fleet. If not the battleship, that vessel remained to be found, and at 8.33 he decided to go on searching to the northward. Cunningham received Pridham-Wippell's radar report at 9.11 p.m. and altered course to close the unknown ship. At 10.10 p.m. *Valiant*, the only battleship with radar, picked her up at a distance of six miles on the port bow. Cunningham altered course together towards, and the destroyers were ordered over to the starboard side. Then, unexpectedly, at 10.25 p.m., two large cruisers ("standing up like haystacks", one of those on *Warspite's* bridge later recalled) with a smaller ship ahead, were sighted about four miles distant, crossing the battle fleet's bows from starboard to port. They were *Zara* and *Fiume* and the destroyers returning to find *Pola*.

They came on quite unsuspecting. The battle fleet was turned back into line ahead, and *Formidable* hauled out to starboard. In silence which, on *Warspite's* bridge could almost be felt, the two forces closed, port to port. There were the quiet voices of the gun control people putting the guns on the target, and finally, when the range was only 3,800 yards, a voice from the director tower: "Director layer sees the target." The firing gongs sounded, and simultaneously with the great flash of the *Warspite's* 15-inch guns the enemy ships were illuminated by searchlights, unprepared, with guns trained fore and aft and men running along their decks. The action lasted less than five minutes, by which time the Italian cruisers were shattered, blazing wrecks. At 10.30 the enemy destroyers attacked with torpedoes, and the battle fleet turned together 90 degrees to starboard while the British destroyers counter-attacked. At 10.35 the battle fleet re-formed in line ahead on a northerly course, and the four screening destroyers were released to sink the two damaged cruisers.

Stuart's account of the next hour is an exciting one. It was spent, mostly at high speed on constantly changing courses, in blackness lit only by the phosphorescent gleam of wash and wake; under the pallid light of star shells; among briefly seen silhouettes of ships firing streams of coloured tracers; and to the crash and flash of gun fire. In the early stages of the mêlée she and *Havock* were together, while *Greyhound* and *Griffin* went chasing enemy destroyers off to the westward. *Stuart* first opened fire at

10.31 on a burning cruiser, and three minutes later shifted target to a destroyer, checking fire at 10.38.⁴ From 10.41 to 10.44 she engaged the rearmost of the retiring enemy destroyers. Waller then returned to his first cruiser target, steering to pass her to starboard, and found a second cruiser circling slowly around the burning ship. At 11 p.m. *Stuart* fired



her full outfit of torpedoes at the two cruisers, and Waller believed a hit was scored on the newcomer. The burning vessel, engaged with gun fire, returned the fire hotly for a few minutes and then fell silent, and Waller went in search of the ship he believed he had torpedoed, and found her at 11.5, stopped and with a heavy list. At this time what appeared to be a third cruiser was seen approaching from the north. *Stuart* increased speed and opened fire on the stopped ship, which replied with heavy and accurate fire but scored no hits. Two of *Stuart's* salvos caused an

⁴ *Stuart's* times.

explosion in her and started fires, and by their light she appeared as a *Zara*-class vessel. Waller now had to alter course sharply to avoid collision with an enemy destroyer which passed swiftly to starboard at point blank range and received three scoring salvos from *Stuart* as she did so.⁵ The Australian destroyer was firing Breda tracer ammunition in addition to her own armament, and at this stage narrowly escaped collision with the cruiser earlier seen to the northward. This ship, presumably thinking *Stuart* was Italian because of the Breda fire, did not engage but continued on a southerly course, and *Stuart* withdrew to the south-west. *Havock* could be seen to the northward engaging an enemy vessel—apparently the destroyer *Stuart* had just engaged—which presently blew up in a big explosion.⁶ Farther to the N.N.W. could be seen what was apparently another cruiser. *Stuart* fired a few more salvos into the now silent *Zara*-class vessel, and checked fire at 11.18 p.m. when a signal was received from the flagship: "All forces not engaged in sinking the enemy retire north-east." By this time *Stuart* had lost touch with the rest of the division, had no torpedoes with which to "engage in sinking the enemy", and retired as ordered. While so doing another cruiser was sighted and engaged with gun fire at 11.30 for six minutes, and a feeble reply was silenced. In a summarising signal to Cunningham, Waller reported that he was leaving the area where were three cruisers stopped and on fire, two other cruisers in the vicinity, and two damaged destroyers. *Stuart* rejoined the battle fleet at 7 o'clock the following morning, 29th March.

In his subsequent report, Waller remarked on the excellent behaviour of *Stuart's* company, whose guns' crews were mainly composed of sixty Reserve ordinary seamen who had been in the ship only five weeks. The majority of them had never previously seen a gun fired at night. "B" gun's crew included five ordinary seamen who had joined *Stuart*, their first ship, in Alexandria two days before the action. They were, Waller said, rather anxious to know if this was a normal Mediterranean night. The Australian captain had a commendatory word for the flashless propellant used by the Italians. "It prevents one's own men knowing a salvo is on the way till it is too late to matter; and it is very easy to pick out one's own hits on the enemy."

Cunningham, in his dispatch, said that

the movements and the results achieved by H.M.A.S. *Stuart's* division during the night remain most obscure. H.M.S. *Havock* certainly sank an enemy destroyer. They had an exciting night and did considerable execution, but the presence of undamaged enemy cruisers in the area at the time seems unlikely and it is not improbable that the ships so reported by H.M.A.S. *Stuart* were in fact some of the others of his own division.

It certainly would appear that something like that was the case.

When, at 11.18 p.m. on the 28th, Cunningham made the signal ordering forces not engaged to retire to the north-east, he did so under the impression that Pridham-Wippell and Mack were in contact with Iachino's

⁵ This was the destroyer *Alfieri*.

⁶ This was the destroyer *Carducci*.

force. Actually, just about that time, a red pyrotechnic signal, probably fired by that force, was seen at a long distance by both Pridham-Wippell from the eastward and Mack from the south. Mack heard Pridham-Wippell's general alarm bearing to his cruisers, and left him to deal with it. Pridham-Wippell was just about to spread his cruisers when he received Cunningham's retirement signal and acted on it. It was the last indication of the main Italian force.

However the night was not quite ended. At twenty minutes past midnight *Havock* found *Pola*, still afloat and unharmed beyond the original torpedo damage. *Havock* at first reported her find as the battleship, and this brought Mack back hotfoot from the westward with his destroyer flotillas. On his arrival he took *Jervis* alongside *Pola*, which was in a state of indescribable confusion, lacking any order or discipline, and with many of her sailors drunk. The crew was taken off, and at 4.10 a.m. on the 29th March Mack sank her with torpedoes, having previously sunk *Zara* by similar means.

At daylight all the British forces met and steamed back to the scene of the night's battle. They found a calm sea covered with a film of oil and strewn with rafts and wreckage, hundreds of Italian survivors, and many floating corpses. The destroyers rescued as many survivors as possible (in all, including those from *Pola*, British ships rescued 900) but rescue operations were broken off by attacks by German dive bombers. It was the only manifestation of the air support promised by the Germans when pressing for the Italian operation, and it cost many Italian lives. Cunningham withdrew to the eastward leaving some hundreds of Italians unrescued, but signalling their exact position to the Italian Admiralty. Greek destroyers picked up 110 survivors on the 29th, and the Italians sent out the hospital ship *Gradisca* (13,870 tons), which eventually saved another 160. During the afternoon of the 29th the fleet was heavily bombed, but escaped damage. It reached Alexandria in the afternoon of 30th March. *Perth* and *Ajax*, and *Stuart* and *Griffin*, previously detached, proceeded to the Aegean to resume work with the "Lustre" convoys.

So ended the Battle of Matapan. The Italians lost the three 8-inch gun cruisers *Zara*, *Pola*, and *Fiume*, and the destroyers *Alfieri* and *Carducci*;⁷ and about 2,400 officers and men. The British lost five aircraft, the crew of one being saved. Iachino fought at a disadvantage in that he had no radar, and, dependent upon land-based aircraft, was ill-served by aerial reconnaissance and air support. With *Formidable*, Cunningham carried air reconnaissance and striking power with him, and was supported also by aircraft operating from Greece and Crete; and he was thus better informed of the forces against him. Apparently it was not until nearly midday on the 28th that Iachino became aware that *Formidable* was at sea, and some hours later before he knew that she was accompanied by battleships. The important result of Matapan, following on Taranto, was

⁷ *Alfieri* and *Carducci*, Italian destroyers (1937), 1,729 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 39 kts.

its strategic influence on the war in deterring the Italian fleet from interfering in later operations, particularly those then pending in Greece and Crete. "Much of these later operations," wrote Cunningham in his dispatch, "may be said to have been conducted under the cover of the Battle of Matapan." Much the same was said by Weichold when he wrote in the essay referred to above:

The unhappy result of this action, the first offensive operation which the Italian Fleet had undertaken through German pressure after nine months of war, was a shattering blow to the Italian navy and its prestige. If they attributed blame to the false German report of the torpedoing of battleships and failure of aircraft support, there at any rate remained an inner reaction—a more stubborn refusal to undertake offensive operations against the superior British sea power.

V

The day after the return of the battle fleet to Alexandria from Matapan, the Axis forces in Tripolitania launched their drive against Cyrenaica. Six days later, Hitler struck in the Balkans. The moment marked the climax of intense political intrigue which had gone on for some months. Rumania's adhesion to the Tripartite Pact was signed in Berlin on the 23rd September 1940, and Hungary adhered shortly afterwards. There followed a steady flow of German troops through Hungary to Rumania. Bulgaria was less tractable, but German infiltration was successful there, and on the 1st March 1941 Bulgaria also signed the pact, and the German army marched in and took over the country. In Yugoslavia popular feeling was against the Axis powers, but on the 4th March Prince Paul, the Regent, was summoned to Berchtesgaden by Hitler, and under extreme pressure undertook that his country would follow Bulgaria's example. On the 25th March Yugoslavia's adherence to the Pact was signed in Vienna. The news was ill-received in Belgrade, and on the 27th March a military revolt overthrew the Regency, acclaimed the young King, Peter II, and set up a government under General Simovic. Hitler was then on the eve of his attack on Greece, and his reaction to this complication on his flank was swift and terrible. Both Yugoslavia and Greece were invaded on the 6th April. In each instance the attack was accompanied by fierce air onslaughts, in Yugoslavia on Belgrade, in Greece on the Piraeus. Yugoslavia, unprepared and lacking organisation and decision, offered ineffectual resistance and capitulated on the 17th April. The defeat of Greece took a few days longer.

Meanwhile reinforcement of Greece continued. On the 29th March the diverted convoy "AG.9" reached Piraeus. That night the southbound "GA.8" left the Greek port escorted by *Stuart*, *Hereward*, and *Griffin*, fresh from their adventures of the night before. The following day the cruiser *Bonaventure* joined the escort, and the convoy proceeded south-east across the Mediterranean. The night came very still and black, with no sound but the swish of the sea breaking from the ships' bows. Just after 3 a.m. on the 31st, midway between Crete and Alexandria, those on *Stuart's* bridge heard two heavy explosions on the far side of the screen.

Bonaventure had been struck by two torpedoes from the submarine *Dagabur*,⁸ and sank almost immediately. Ordering *Hereward* to pick up survivors and *Griffin* to continue with the convoy, *Stuart* raced across and attacked intensively with depth charges. She was herself near-missed by a torpedo which exploded in her wake fifty yards astern as she ran in. Seven attacks were made by *Stuart*, and two by *Hereward* after that ship had rescued 310 survivors from the cruiser. The submarine broke surface after *Stuart's* second attack, crash dived, and apparently escaped. The convoy reached Alexandria late in the afternoon of the 31st without further incident.

Two days later *Voyager* was one of the escorts of convoy AS.23 when it was dive-bombed and lost two ships, the British *Homefield* (5,324 tons), and the Greek *Coulouros Xenos* (4,914 tons), south of Gavdhos Island in the afternoon of the 2nd April. She put parties on board both ships, but they were damaged beyond hope of salvage, and shortly before midnight she hastened their sinking with gun fire and depth charges.

Vampire was with two of the last convoys, "AN.27" and "AS.26", both of which suffered in air attacks. In the northbound convoy the tanker *British Science* (7,138 tons) was lost. In the southbound "AS.26", another tanker, *British Lord* (6,098 tons) was near-missed south of Gavdhos Island, and disabled. *Vampire* went alongside and removed her crew, and the abandoned ship was later taken in tow by the sloop *Auckland*, and reached port safely. In all, between the 22nd March, on which day the first ship losses occurred, and the 18th April, the date on which *British Science* sank, twenty-five ships were lost in the operation. Only seven of them were sunk in convoys at sea. Most of the remainder were lost in air attacks on Greek ports. An exceptionally important loss occurred on 3rd April when the *Northern Prince* (10,917 tons) was destroyed by air attack in convoy ANF.24. She had on board several thousand tons of powder for the Greek ammunition factories, and her safe arrival had been anxiously awaited by the Greek military authorities.

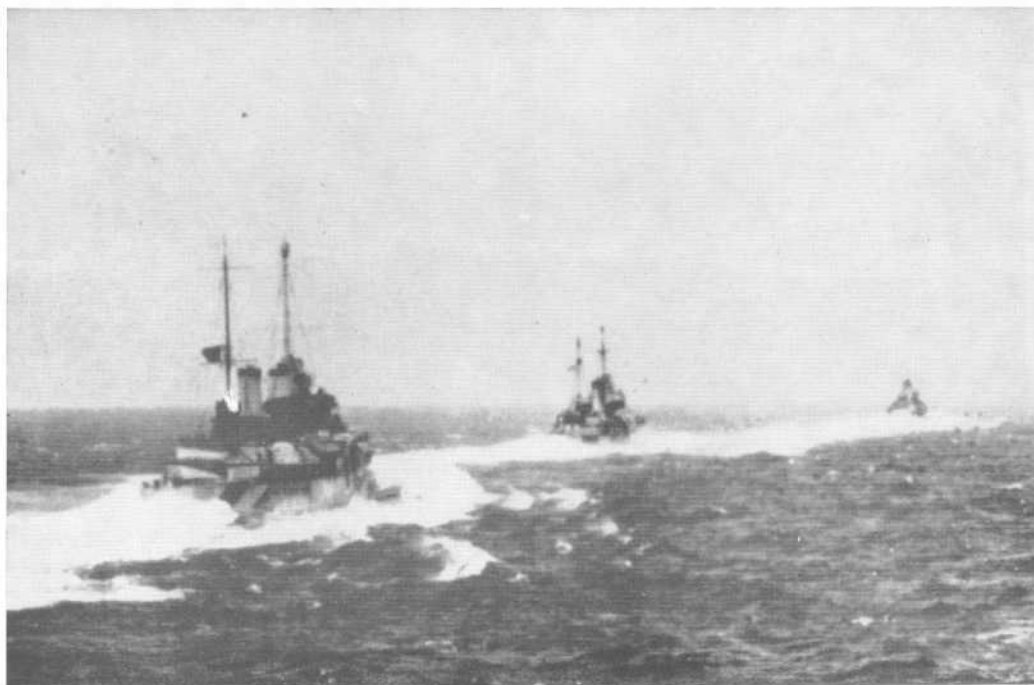
"When the decision to send troops [to Greece] was finally taken," Cunningham recalled in later years, "we started at once to think of how we should bring them out." That thought was with the other Commanders-in-Chief from the outset, and was also in the minds of the Australian and New Zealand Governments. On the 24th March the First Sea Lord, in a personal signal to Cunningham, told him that both Governments, when agreeing to the use of their forces in Greece, had asked that adequate arrangements might be prepared in advance to withdraw them should it become necessary. Cunningham was asked to confirm that he had this possibility in mind "in order that we may be able to reassure the Australian and New Zealand Governments". He replied that since the decision was reached to move into Greece, the problem of withdrawal had been much in his thoughts. Its solution depended upon the military situation which would dictate what troops could be withdrawn, the areas of withdrawal,

⁸ *Dagabur*, Italian submarine (1937), 620 tons, one 3.9-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 14 kts.



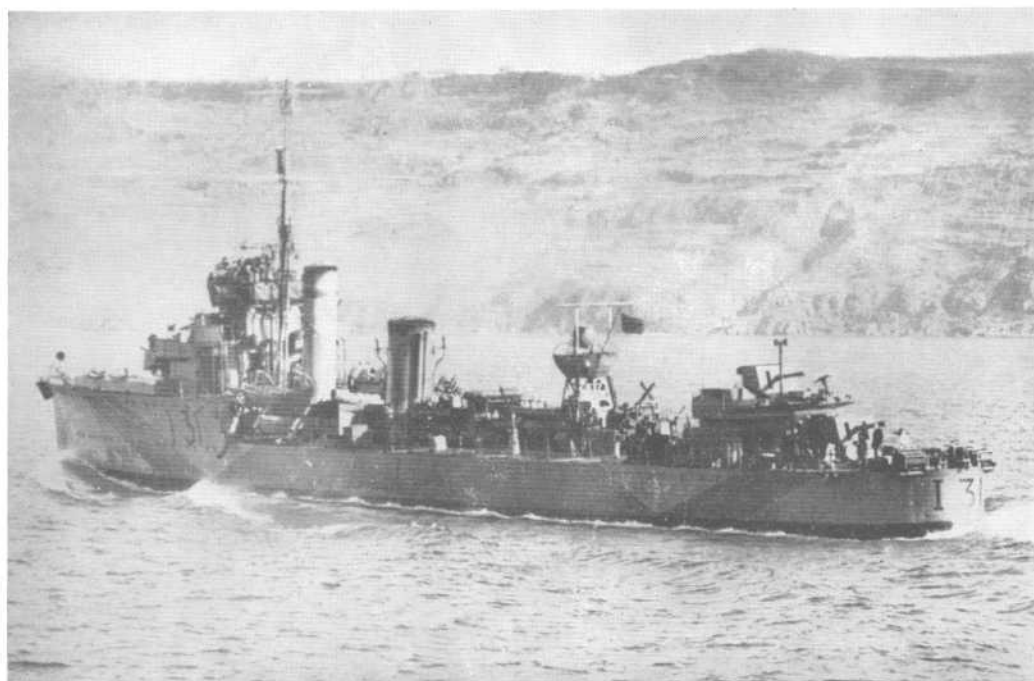
Mediterranean Battle Fleet at Sea.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



(Petty Officer G. A. Balshaw, R.A.N.)

H.M.A.S. *Perth*, H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Orion* at Battle of Matapan, 28th March 1941.



(Department of Information)

H.M.A.S. *Voyager*, off Suda Bay, during Evacuation of Crete, 25th May 1941.



(Petty Officer G. A. Balshaw, R.A.N.)

The Cruisers at Matapan 28th March 1941, making Smoke when in action with Italian Battleship *Vittoria Veneto*. H.M.A.S. *Perth* in foreground.



(Department of Information)

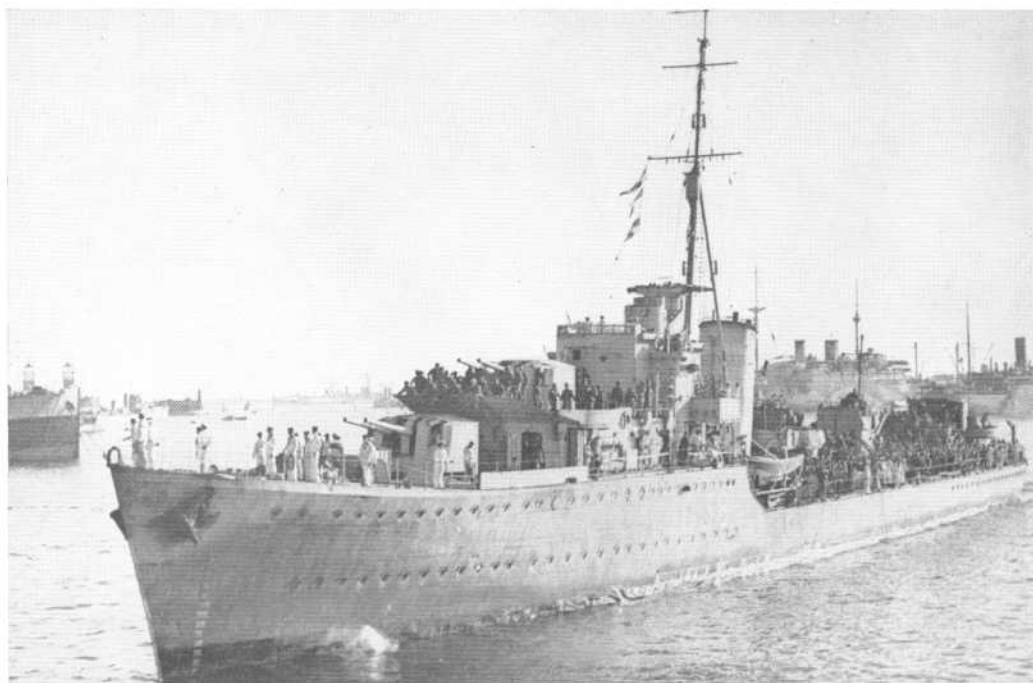
Captain Sir Philip Bowyer-Smyth and Officers on Bridge of *Perth*.



(Department of Information)
Captain H. B. Farncomb.



(Department of Information)
Captain H. A. Showers.



(War Office)
H.M.A.S. *Nizam* entering Alexandria Harbour on 31st May 1941 with Troops evacuated from Crete.

and the types of ships which could be used. He suggested that the simplest form of preparation would be the detention of a large number of personnel ships in the Mediterranean, but commented that this was a shortsighted policy in view of the shipping situation; and concluded that he could only guarantee that everything possible would be done to withdraw the Dominion troops with the British.

By the middle of April it was evident that Yugoslavia was at the point of collapse, and that the military situation in Greece was deteriorating. On the 13th of the month Cunningham received from Rear-Admiral Turle,⁹ the Naval Attaché in Athens, his first intimation that the withdrawal of British troops was imminent, and the following day the Greek Commander-in-Chief himself suggested it to General Wilson "to spare Greece from devastation".¹ On the 15th, Wavell, Longmore, and Cunningham, at a conference in *Warspite* in Alexandria, decided that withdrawal was the only possible course. To this the British Government agreed on the 17th April, subject to endorsement by the Greek Government. Four days later the Greek King expressed entire agreement.

Naval preparations were already in hand. Assembly of the necessary naval units for Operation DEMON, as the withdrawal was designated, denuded the Western Desert Force and immobilised the battle fleet by depriving it of its destroyers. The operation was, as a result, carried out lacking heavy surface cover against the Italian Fleet. Naval forces used included six cruisers, twenty destroyers, four escort vessels, two of the "Glen" ships, and a number of powered lighters including six "A" lighters.² Eight troopships took part in the actual embarkations at the beaches, and a ninth was lost on the way to her embarkation point. A further five were used in troop convoys from Crete to Egypt.³ Organisation of the naval side in Greece was handled by Rear-Admiral H. T. Baillie-Grohman, formerly captain of *Ramillies*, and now Flag Officer Attached, Middle East. The Rear-Admiral, Alexandria, G. H. Creswell,⁴ was responsible for the provision of troopships, the organisation of northbound convoys, and their arrival when required in the Aegean. Operations afloat were conducted by Pridham-Wippell.

Baillie-Grohman arrived in Athens on the 17th April, and found a confused situation. Piraeus, the only port with quays for large vessels apart from Kalamata in the Morea, was wrecked when the ammunition ship *Clan Fraser* (7,529 tons) blew up in a German air raid on the night of the 6th-7th April. The explosion destroyed twelve ships, made seven of the twelve berths unusable, and put harbour facilities out of action.

⁹ Rear-Adm C. E. Turle, CBE, DSO; RN. Naval Attaché, Athens and Sofia, 1940-45. B. 1883.

¹ For the detailed story of the negotiations see *Greece, Crete and Syria*, by Gavin Long, in the army series of this history.

² "A" lighter—Landing Craft, Tanks—maximum load 900 men.

"D" lighter—Landing Craft, Mechanical vehicles—maximum load 150 men.

³ *City of London* (8,956 tons), *Comliebank* (5,149), *Corinthia* (3,701), *Costa Rica* (8,672), *Delane* (6,054), *Dilwara* (11,080), *Ionia* (1,936), *Itria* (6,845), *Khedive Ismail* (7,290), *Pennland* (16,082), *Salween* (7,063), *Slamat* (11,636), *Thurland Castle* (6,372), *Ulster Prince* (3,791).

⁴ Rear-Adm G. H. Creswell, CB, DSO, DSC; RN. (Comd HMS's *Dove*, *Dee*, *Look Out*, *Liberty* 1915-18.) Capt (D) Fourth Flotilla 1939-40; Rear-Adm, Alexandria, 1940-42. Of Colchester, Eng; b. 17 Jun 1889.

Twenty or more merchant ships were gathered in adjacent bays waiting for coal and water. German air superiority showed itself in massed attacks on ships, and on the 21st and 22nd April twenty-three vessels were sunk in Greek waters. It was clear that embarkation would mainly be from beaches, and suitable places were reconnoitred, and arrangements made to charter and fit out caiques and other local craft for ferrying purposes.

On the 18th April Baillie-Grohman learned that General Papagos had told Wilson that he "would like the British forces to be withdrawn as soon as practicable". It appeared then that the earliest date for the start of the embarkation would be the 28th April; but on the 21st it was learned in Athens that the Germans had reached Yannina the previous evening and that the Greek army in Epirus had capitulated. This placed the whole British left rear under threat. At a conference between Wilson, Baillie-Grohman, and the commander of the Anzac Corps, General Blamey,⁵ in the evening of the 21st, it was decided that embarkation should begin at the earliest possible date, "which was likely to be the night of the 24th-25th April".

In Alexandria, Creswell's preparations were circumscribed in the early stages. One "Glen" ship was being used in a commando raid on Bardia, and the commander of the Tobruk garrison, who "could not have known the urgency of DEMON, protested at the withdrawal of five "A" lighters from that port. No DEMON plans were to be implemented unless demanded by General Headquarters, Middle East; and merchant ships could be "ear-marked" but not held for the operation. On the 21st, on which day an inter-services conference at Cairo decided that the withdrawal should begin on the 28th, the last "Lustre" convoy, "AN.29", sailed from Alexandria, escorted by *Grimsby*, *Vendetta* and *Waterhen*. The following day Creswell sailed the first DEMON convoy, "AG.13", the three "Glen" ships and *Ulster Prince*, escorted by *Calcutta*, *Phoebe*, *Stuart* and *Voyager*. *Glenroy* ran aground leaving Alexandria, and took no further part in the operation. Three hours after the convoy sailed, Creswell learned that embarkation might start on the 24th instead of the 28th, and this was confirmed at 7 p.m. on the 22nd. A further convoy, "ANF.29", *Delane*, *Pennland* and *Thurland Castle* escorted by *Coventry*, *Wryneck*, *Diamond* and *Griffin*, sailed on the 23rd. The following day two more were sailed, "AG.14" of *Costa Rica*, *City of London*, *Dilhara*, *Salween*, *Slamat* and *Khediye Ismail*, escorted by *Carlisle*, *Kandahar* and *Kingston*; and "AG.15" which included *Ionia*, *Corinthia*, *Itria*, and *Comliebank*, escorted by *Kimberley*, *Vampire* and *Auckland*. At 7.15 on the 24th April, Pridham-Wippell in *Orion*, with *Decoy*, *Hasty*, *Havock* and *Defender*, sailed from Alexandria.

Baillie-Grohman's original outline plan (of 20th April) was for embarkation of a maximum of 56,000 troops during a period of five days from the 28th April. It was intended to use the "Glens" and some troop-

⁵ Field Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey, GBE, KCB, CMG, DSO, ED, VX1. (1st AIF: BGGS Aust Corps.) GOC 6 Div 1939-40, I Aust Corps 1940-41; Dep C-in-C ME 1941; GOC-in-C AMF 1942-46. Of Melbourne; b. Wagga Wagga, NSW, 24 Jan 1884. Died 27 May 1951.

ships as ferries between embarkation points and Crete, and the remainder from embarkation points direct to Egypt. Twenty-one embarkation points were provided. The advanced date of the operation resulted in greater use of Crete as a staging point, and the reduction of embarkation beaches to eight: Rafina and Porto Rafti, east of Athens; Megara, west of Athens; Miloi, Navplion, and Tolos, at the head of the Gulf of Navplion; Monemvasia, in the south-east; and Kalamata in the south-west of Morea. Embarkations took place in the moonless period, but in anticipation of air attacks Baillie-Grohman laid down that ships should reach their embarkation points one hour after dark and leave by 3 o'clock the following morning. Apart from that, he merely indicated the numbers to be embarked and the dates and places of embarkation. Movements of ships were controlled by Pridham-Wippell, who had an over-all view of the situation afloat which Baillie-Grohman lacked.

Convoy "AG.13" reached Suda Bay at 1 a.m. on the 24th. *Phoebe*, detached some hours earlier, joined *Perth*, patrolling in the Kithera Channel. At 10.20 a.m. on the 24th the convoy, its escort strengthened by *Hyacinth* and *Salvia*, left Suda Bay for the first embarkations, at Porto Rafti and Navplion. The passage north was uneventful, and at 5 p.m. *Calcutta*, *Glengyle*, and *Salvia* parted company for Rafti, while *Glennearn* and *Ulster Prince* with *Stuart*, *Voyager* and *Hyacinth* went to Navplion. *Perth* and *Phoebe* were ordered to assist the embarkations at Rafti and Navplion respectively. *Perth* reached Porto Rafti at midnight on the 24th and found embarkation in full swing and going well. The weather was good, and the operation was conducted in darkness with hardly a light showing. It had been planned to lift 4,000 troops, but a total of 5,750 were embarked and ferried out to *Calcutta* and *Glengyle* in an "A" lighter, a "D" lighter, and boats. At 4 a.m. the beach was cleared and the ships sailed.

Events were less fortunate with the Navplion group. Shortly after parting company, as *Phoebe* was joining from the south, the ships were attacked by two German dive bombers. The first missed *Glennearn* with four bombs close astern. The second, though hotly engaged by *Stuart* and *Voyager*, scored a direct hit on *Glennearn's* forecastle, wrecked the cable gear and anchors, started a fire, and forced the ship to stop while the fire was subdued. *Ulster Prince*, with *Voyager* and *Hyacinth*, were sent on ahead and reached Navplion at 9.15 p.m., feeling their way cautiously in the darkness. *Hyacinth* entered the harbour and embarked 113 troops alongside. *Ulster Prince* grounded at the harbour entrance, got off under her own power, but grounded again trying to go alongside. This time she remained hard and fast. *Phoebe*, *Glennearn* and *Stuart* arrived at 9.45 and lay off the harbour with *Voyager*, and embarkation proceeded by "A" lighter, caiques and boats, while in the harbour *Hyacinth* tried vainly, by towing, to refloat *Ulster Prince*, whose quota of troops was embarked in *Phoebe*. *Voyager* embarked 301, of whom 160 were unexpected guests. In the darkness a large caique loomed alongside packed with dimly seen figures encumbered with packs, respirators, and steel helmets. Something

in their demeanour as they were helped on to the destroyer intrigued one of *Voyager's* ratings. "I took a closer look at the troops," he later recalled, "and turned to our Gunner standing near by, and whispered: 'Look, Sir, they're women!'" They were Australian, New Zealand and British nursing sisters, one of whom nearly lost her passage. The caique was surging in a choppy sea, and she missed her footing and fell between the two ships. Ordinary Seaman Webb,⁶ of *Voyager*, immediately jumped in and held her up until a line could be passed and both hauled to safety. His action, wrote Morrow, "probably saved the sister's life as she was weighed down with equipment and there was a grave danger of them both being crushed between the ships". Shortly before 4 a.m. embarkation was completed and the ships, except *Ulster Prince*, sailed. At 8 a.m. they joined forces with the Porto Rafti group, and course was shaped for Suda Bay.

Ulster Prince, aground at Navplion, remained to become a total wreck from German air attacks. During the 25th a British soldier on a hill behind the port watched "five planes attacking a two-funnelled ship". When he saw her again that night she was blazing from stem to stern. She was not only a loss as a valuable troop carrier, but a physical obstruction which slowed down later embarkations at Navplion.

The rest of the ships, which according to Pridham-Wippell carried a total of 12,435,⁷ were unsuccessfully attacked by dive bombers at midday on the 25th, and reached Suda Bay during the afternoon.

To Pridham-Wippell, at that time in the Aegean with his force bound for Suda Bay, the military situation in Greece was obscure. Baillie-Grohman's embarkation program, signalled to him the previous day, was: nights of 25th-26th, 5,000 from Megara; 26th-27th, 27,000 from unspecified points; 27th-28th, no embarkations; 28th-29th, 4,000 from Githion and Monemvasia; 29th-30th, 4,000 from Kalamata, Githion, and Monemvasia. The convoy position was: "AN.29" was in Suda Bay, where it had arrived on the 24th and experienced heavy dive-bombing attacks on the harbour in which one Greek ship was sunk; "ANF.29" was in the Aegean bound for Megara (except *Delane* and *Diamond*, detached to Suda Bay) to carry out the embarkation there; "AG.14" was in Kaso Strait bound for Suda Bay and under air attack; "AG.15" was in the Mediterranean making up for Kaso Strait. The oiler *Brambleleaf* (5,917 tons), escorted by *Isis*,⁸ *Hero*, *Hotspur* and *Hereward*, was in Kaso Strait bound for Suda, where no fuel then remained.

⁶ AB C. J. Webb, PM2347, RANR. HMAS's *Voyager* 1940-42, *Arunta* 1943, *Stuart* 1943, *Shepparton* 1944-46. Of North Richmond, Vic; b. Broken Hill, NSW, 24 Feb 1915.

⁷ The numbers planned to be lifted were 4,000 at Porto Rafti and 5,000 at Navplion. Pridham-Wippell's report gives the totals embarked as 5,750 and 6,685. Reports made at the time vary considerably. The beachmasters reported 5,750 at Porto Rafti and 5,500 at Navplion. Baillie-Grohman gave a joint total of 10,200. Pridham-Wippell's figures in detail are—Porto Rafti: "About 5,000 in *Glengyle* and 700 in *Calcutta*"; Navplion: *Phoebe*, 1,131; *Glenearn*, 5,100; *Voyager*, 340; *Stuart*, 1; *Hyacinth*, 113; a total for the night of 12,435. Throughout this account Pridham-Wippell's figures are used, as being those presumably supplied by the individual ships and therefore most likely to be reliable (though discrepancies occur, as in Pridham-Wippell's 340 for *Voyager* as against that ship's own report of 301 embarked in this operation); and as approximating in the aggregate to the total of 50,662 for the whole series of embarkations, which has apparently been accepted as the official figure by the Admiralty and the British Government.

⁸ HMS *Isis*, destroyer (1937), 1,370 tons, four 4.7-in guns, ten 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk off Normandy, 20 Jul 1944.

During the afternoon Pridham-Wippell detached *Decoy*, *Hasty* and *Havock* from his screen to Navplion to investigate the situation there, and ordered *Waterhen* and *Vendetta* from "ANF.29" to assist in the Megara embarkation. He himself reached Suda Bay at 6 p.m. At that time *Voyager*, having disembarked her troops and nurses, cleared the harbour escorting a convoy to Alexandria. She took no further part in embarkations.

Waterhen and *Vendetta* left Suda Bay for Megara at 2.30 p.m. on the 25th. About four hours later they sighted *Pennland*, of "ANF.29", which had been damaged in an air attack, with *Griffin* standing by. The Australians, told there was no assistance they could give, continued on to Megara. *Pennland*, again attacked and damaged, sank during the evening, and *Griffin* returned to Suda Bay with her survivors. Pridham-Wippell thereupon diverted *Decoy*, *Hasty* and *Havock* from Navplion to Megara to embark *Pennland's* troops.

The night was still, dark and clear. The Australian destroyers reached Megara at 10 p.m. and joined *Thurland Castle*, *Coventry*, and *Wryneck* of "ANF.29" at the centre of the beach, where embarkation was proceeding with an "A" lighter and other landing craft, seven caiques, and boats as ferrying craft. Here *Vendetta* embarked 100 troops in her whaler and skiff. With *Decoy*, *Hasty*, and *Wryneck*, the Australians were then ordered to close a pier at the eastern end of the beach, from which they embarked with their boats. At about 3.45 a.m. on the 26th the main embarkation force sailed. Boats' crews reported the beach cleared at 4 a.m., and *Vendetta* weighed and proceeded to join *Waterhen*, lying off awaiting her. Just then a large caïque appeared, and *Vendetta* embarked about 30 troops from her, and learned from her coxswain that some 250 wounded remained on the beach, stranded owing to the breakdown of the "A" lighter. *Coventry* was still in visual signalling distance, and Lieut-Commander Rhoades in *Vendetta* asked permission to remain and embark them. This was not granted, and at 4.15 both ships sailed to join the main body at the entrance to the Gulf of Athens.

Vendetta embarked 350 officers and men, mainly Australians; *Waterhen* a total of 70.⁹ Sixty of *Vendetta's* troops were wounded, mostly by shrapnel. "Their morale," wrote Rhoades, "was excellent, and it was stated by all that, had adequate air protection been available, the Germans would never have got through the passes." During its passage to Suda Bay the convoy suffered three heavy but fruitless dive-bombing attacks. "The troops," recorded Rhoades, "maintained a battery of Bren guns on the forecastle and quarterdeck and appeared to enjoy the air raids, as they said it was the first time they had seen decent opposition to German aircraft since the beginning of the withdrawal." There were a number of near misses, but no hits, "due", wrote a diarist in *Waterhen*, "to excellent shooting and escorting by *Coventry*. Soldiers cheer loudly as bombers steadily miss". Suda Bay was reached without mishap at 6 p.m. on the

⁹ Pridham-Wippell's figures for Megara are: *Thurland Castle*, *Coventry*, *Wryneck*, *Diamond* and *Griffin*, 4,600; *Decoy*, *Hasty* and *Havock*, 1,300; a total of 5,900. He makes no mention of *Waterhen* and *Vendetta*; but it is possible they were given in his report as *Diamond* and *Griffin*, which ships did not take part in the embarkation.

26th, and *Waterhen's* diarist closed an eventful day with the entry: "Disembarked troops, fuelled, and had a few drinks with Mr Waldron,¹ Commissioned Engineer of *Wryneck*."

The situation afloat on the night 25th-26th, apart from the embarkation at Megara, was: *Brambleleaf* and destroyer screen entered Suda Bay at 3 a.m. on the 26th; Convoy "AG.14" was in the Aegean north of Crete ready for the embarkations on the night of 26th-27th; Convoy "AG.15" passed through Kaso Strait during the night and reached Suda Bay in the early afternoon of the 26th minus *Vampire*, detached during the morning to assist the steamer *Scottish Prince* (4,917 tons), bombed and abandoned forty miles E.N.E. of Suda Bay.² The destroyer *Nubian* was in the Aegean, proceeding independently to Suda Bay. Pridham-Wippell was at sea throughout the night with *Orion*, *Perth*, *Phoebe* and *Defender*, covering operations.

During the forenoon of the 26th, under the close cover of Pridham-Wippell's force, the ships for the night's operations concentrated north of Crete, and convoys were formed. Baillie-Grohman had arranged for embarkations at Rafina, Rafti, Navplion, Tolos, and Kalamata, and requested a "Glen" ship at each of Rafina and Navplion. The "Glens", with *Calcutta*, *Stuart*, *Diamond* and *Griffin*, left Suda Bay early in the morning and joined Pridham-Wippell at 1 p.m. *Nubian* had also reached the area, and she and *Glengyle* joined *Salween*, *Carlisle*, *Kandahar* and *Kingston* of "AG.14", the two first-named for Rafina and the remainder for Porto Rafti. The four *Brambleleaf* destroyers, *Isis*, *Hero*, *Hereward* and *Hotspur*, left Suda Bay at 10 a.m. Shortly before midday they passed the south-bound Megara convoy, then under heavy air attack, and reached the convoy concentration area soon after noon. *Isis* and *Hotspur* joined the Navplion-Tolos convoy, consisting of *Glennearn*, *Calcutta*, *Griffin* and *Diamond*, with *Slamat* and *Khedive Ismail* from "AG.14", *Hereward* and *Hero* joined the Kalamata group of *Dilwara*, *City of London* and *Costa Rica* from "AG.14", and *Phoebe* and *Defender* from Pridham-Wippell's force. Early in the afternoon the convoys sailed for their respective destinations.

They reached their embarkation points without incident, except the Navplion-Tolos group. At 4.40 p.m. eight German dive bombers attacked this convoy unsuccessfully; but in a second attack two hours later *Glennearn* was hit and disabled. *Griffin* was left with her, and eventually towed her to Kisamos Bay, west of Cape Spada. She was later towed thence to Alexandria by *Grimsby*. Her landing craft were sent to Monemvasia. On hearing that she was disabled, Pridham-Wippell took *Orion*, *Perth* and *Stuart* to Navplion to replace her in the embarkation there.

¹ Lt (E) M. V. Waldron, MBE, DSC; RN. HMS's *Wryneck* 1938-41, *Hatherleigh* 1941-42, *Haydon* 1942-45, *Odyssey* 1945-46. B. 24 May 1900.

² *Vampire* reached *Scottish Prince* at 5.30 p.m. on the 26th and relieved *Hasty*, who was standing by after putting the merchant seamen back on board their ship. *Scottish Prince* was making water, but the leak was got under control, and at 7.30 *Grimsby* arrived, steam was raised in the merchant ship, and with *Grimsby* leading and *Vampire* screening both vessels, Suda Bay was reached at 6.10 a.m. on the 27th.

Calcutta, *Diamond*, *Isis* and *Hotspur*, with *Slamat* and *Khedive Ismail*, reached Navplion soon after 8 p.m. and began embarking with a caique and ships' boats as ferries. The weather had deteriorated, and a moderate wind blew a choppy sea straight into the harbour, which destroyers were unable to enter because of the wreck of *Ulster Prince*. Coupled with the absence of *Glencarn's* landing craft, these conditions made ferrying slow and dangerous in the small boats, and resulted in no troops being embarked in *Khedive Ismail*. Ashore, the troops were drawn up three-deep on the quay. "They behaved splendidly," wrote the officer in charge of the boats from *Isis*, "waiting in silence to embark immediately we came alongside."

Orion and *Perth* reached Navplion at 11.30 p.m., *Stuart* was detached and arrived at Tolos a quarter of an hour earlier. The two cruisers anchored close inshore, lowered their boats, and began embarkation. At Tolos, *Stuart* found a loaded "A" lighter lying off shore. She embarked 600 troops from it, and Waller wirelessly Pridham-Wippell requesting a cruiser to help to embark a large number of troops still on shore. He then sent the "A" lighter inshore to reload and await the arrival of *Perth* (which Pridham-Wippell dispatched from Navplion shortly before 1 a.m. on the 27th) while *Stuart* proceeded to Navplion and transferred her troops to *Orion*, after which she returned to Tolos. It was due to Waller's foresight in these operations that a far larger number was evacuated than otherwise would have been possible. *Perth* anchored at Tolos at 1.40 a.m. and embarked 300 troops from the "A" lighter, which then returned for a further load. Meanwhile *Stuart* arrived back and anchored inshore of *Perth*, and began to embark, using her own and the cruiser's boats. In all, the two Australian ships embarked 1,020 troops—911 in *Perth* and 109 in *Stuart*. In addition, as remarked above, *Stuart* ferried 600 from Tolos to *Orion* at Navplion.

The troopship convoy sailed from Navplion at 4.15 a.m. on the 27th, delayed by *Slamat*, which remained beyond the "safety" hour although repeatedly told to sail at 3 a.m. Some 1,700 troops were left on shore. *Perth* and *Stuart* weighed and sailed from Tolos at 4.30 a.m. At that time, Captain Bowyer-Smyth³ in *Perth* was told by the beachmaster that "there were less than a lighter load" left ashore (actually there were about 1,300), and that German troops had crossed the Corinth Canal and were within seven or eight miles of Tolos. Bowyer-Smyth told him to embark the remaining troops in the "A" lighter and work down the coast to Monemvasia. (This was done and the lighter, with 600 Australians on board, reached Monemvasia at daylight on the 28th.) At 7 a.m. *Perth* and *Stuart* joined *Orion* off Parapola Island, fifty miles south-east of Navplion, and the force proceeded to Suda Bay, where they arrived that afternoon.

At 7 a.m. the slower troopship convoy was some fifteen miles astern of the cruisers. *Isis* and *Hotspur* were both filled with troops, and to

³ Cmdr Sir Philip Bowyer-Smyth, Bt; RN. HMS's *Superb* 1914-15, *Marlborough* 1915-17, *King George V* 1917-19; Naval Attaché at Rome 1939-40; comd HMAS *Perth* 1940-41; Dir of Radio Equip, Admiralty, 1943-44. Of London; b. 4 Feb 1894.

enable them to press on ahead to Suda Bay, Pridham-Wippell ordered *Wryneck*, *Waterhen* and *Vendetta* from that base to relieve them on the convoy screen. At 6.45 a.m. heavy high level and dive bombing attacks developed on the convoy and at 7 a.m. *Slamat* received direct hits which stopped her and set her badly on fire. *Diamond* was detached to stand by and pick up survivors. Shortly afterwards the three Suda Bay destroyers were sighted ahead, and *Wryneck* was ordered to help *Diamond*, which was being constantly dive-bombed during her rescue work. At 9.25 a.m. *Diamond* reported that she had picked up most of the survivors and was proceeding to Suda. An hour later *Wryneck* requested fighter protection. It was the last heard from the two ships. When they failed to arrive at Suda, *Griffin* was sent to search for them. At 2.30 a.m. on the 28th April she found a raft from *Wryneck*, and subsequently picked up some survivors from whom it was learned that both ships had received direct hits in a bombing attack soon after 1 p.m. on the 27th, and had sunk immediately. Thus Waller's 10th Flotilla lost its second and third ships, with most of their complements. Total survivors from them and *Slamat*—whose rescued they were carrying—were one naval officer, forty-one ratings, and eight soldiers.

The other embarkations on the night 26th-27th went off without undue incident. At Rafina and Porto Rafti, 8,220 troops were embarked, and the *Rafina* group sailed about 3 a.m. on the 27th and the *Porto Rafti* ships a few minutes later. The two groups concentrated at 3.30 a.m. and proceeded south in convoy.

At Kalamata, *Hero* and *Hereward*, sent on ahead of the convoy, arrived off the harbour at 9.25 p.m. on the 26th. *Flamingo* was ordered to Kalamata in daylight to make preliminary arrangements with the army authorities, but did not receive the signal. In consequence she was not there (but arrived later) and Biggs,⁴ commanding officer of *Hero*, found the entrance to the harbour unlit and most misleading in the dark

and when he got his ship alongside that

the quay was practically deserted and great difficulty was experienced in finding anyone to berth the ships. It appeared that no information had been received about embarkation as the telephone system was out of action and the army W/T set had failed to receive any signals during the day.

However, within ten minutes some 400 R.A.F. officers and ranks and about 150 Army ranks arrived, and the quays were soon a scene of activity. *Hero* rigged lights on both harbour breakwaters and the inner mole head, and she, *Hereward* and *Defender* ferried troops from the embarked, making a total for the night of 21,400⁵ from all points. Biggs, harbour quays to the transports lying off. Some 6,800 troops were

⁴ Rear-Adm H. W. Biggs, CB, DSO; RN, Comd HMS's *Glengyle* 1940, *Hero* 1940-42, *Rotherham* and Capt (D) 11 Flotilla 1944-45. B. 15 Jan 1905.

⁵ Pridham-Wippell's detailed figures: Rafina: *Glengyle*, 3,500; *Nubian*, 3; Porto Rafti: *Salween*, 2,000; *Carlisle*, 1,310; *Kandahar*, 560; *Kingston*, 850; Navplion: *Orion*, 600; *Slamat* (estimated), 500; *Calcutta*, 960; *Isis*, 408; *Hotspur*, 500; *Khedive Ismail*, nil; *Diamond*, nil. Tolos: *Orion*, 600 (ex-Stuart); *Perth*, 850; *Stuart*, 109. Kalamata: *Dilwara*, 2,400; *City of London*, 3,500; *Costa Rica*, 2,500; *Defender*, 250 and Yugoslav Crown Jewels; *Phoebe*, nil; *Flamingo*, nil; *Hero*, nil; *Hereward*, nil.

in his report, expressed the opinion that had prior arrangements been made at Kalamata to light the harbour entrance and withdraw troops from the defence positions to the quay in readiness for embarkations, each destroyer could have made another ferry trip and a further 3,000 could have been embarked. The ships sailed at 3.40 a.m., leaving some 10,000 troops behind.

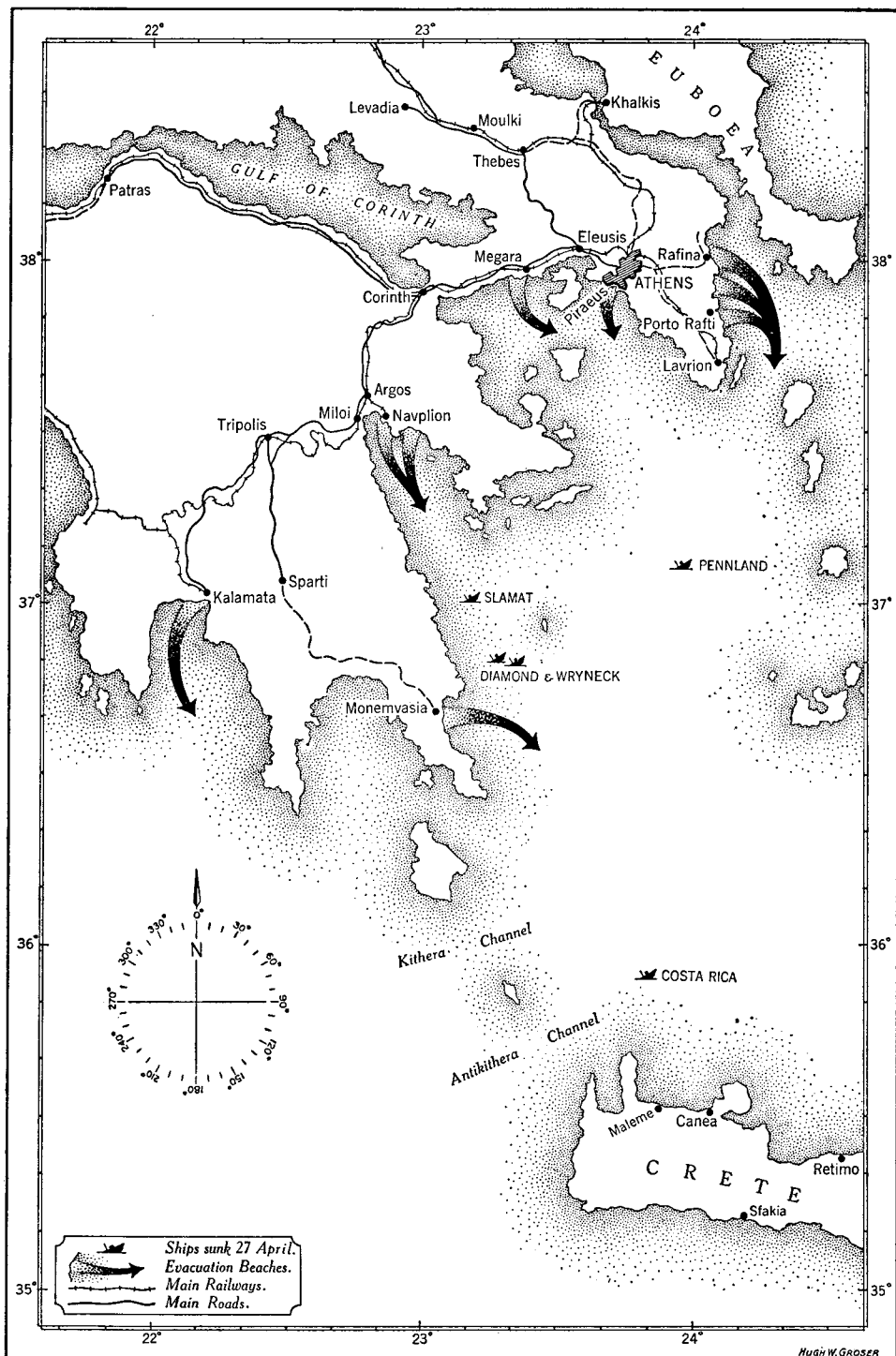
During the Rafina embarkation the naval force there was joined by *Decoy* and *Hasty*, and *Nubian* steamed across to Kea Island, where 600 troops had been reported. She found only three New Zealanders. The remainder had gone to Porto Rafti in an "A" lighter and were, apparently, subsequently embarked from there.

The Kalamata convoy re-entered the Aegean through the Antikithera Channel in the early afternoon of the 27th April. By this time Suda Bay was dangerously crowded, and Pridham-Wippell decided to get as many ships as possible away to Alexandria. The troopships from the night's embarkation points did not therefore go to Crete, but concentrated north of the island in the early afternoon, and convoy "GA.14" was formed of *Glengyle*, *Salween*, *Khedive Ismail*, *Dilwara*, *City of London* and *Costa Rica*. There were sundry air attacks on the various convoys during the morning, and about 3 p.m., as the ships were concentrating, *Costa Rica* was near-missed in a surprise attack by three dive bombers. A 1,000-lb bomb caused a vertical split in the ship's side abreast the engine room, and the master's quick assessment that she would sink in about an hour proved correct. *Defender*, *Hereward* and *Hero* went alongside in turn and removed all the troops and ship's company. *Hero* reported one man lost. At 4.20 p.m. *Costa Rica* sank. The three destroyers proceeded to Suda Bay with the survivors. Later in the afternoon the remaining four Australian destroyers, *Stuart*, *Vampire*, *Vendetta* and *Waterhen*, with *Coventry*, *Calcutta* and *Flamingo*, sailed as escort to Convoy "GA.14" to Alexandria, which was reached in the early morning of the 29th April after an uneventful passage.

Embarkations on the night of the 27th-28th were from two points, Porto Rafti and Rafina. The cruiser *Ajax* from Alexandria joined Pridham-Wippell's flag at 7.30 a.m. on the 27th and she, with *Kingston* and *Kimberley*, embarked 3,840 troops at Porto Rafti, while *Havock* steamed up the coast to Rafina and embarked 800 there.⁶ The operation was conducted without incident, and the ships reached Suda at 10 a.m. on the 28th.

The night of the 28th-29th was fixed for final embarkations from Greece, at Monemvasia, Kithera, and Kalamata. *Isis* and *Griffin* left Suda Bay at 6 p.m. on the 28th and reached Monemvasia at 10.30 p.m. Everything was ready for embarkation by *Glennearn's* landing craft from five points on the causeway connecting Monemvasia island with the main. Army organisation and the discipline of the troops were "magnificent", wrote Baillie-Grohman, who was present, "especially considering that

⁶ Pridham-Wippell's detailed figures—Rafti: *Ajax*, 2,500; *Kingston*, 640; *Kimberley*, 700. Rafina: *Havock*, 800.



Withdrawal from Greece

they had been fighting a rearguard action for some weeks, from Salonika almost to Cape Matapan". The destroyers closed well in, and by 1 a.m. on the 29th *Isis* had embarked 900 troops ("Australian, New Zealand and other units, all of whom were in excellent spirits and full of confidence") and sailed for Suda. At this hour *Ajax*, *Hotspur* and *Havock* arrived to continue embarkation. On the way north this force sighted a flare ahead and *Havock*, racing in for a possible submarine,

was right over the spot before a little dark shape was discerned in the water, and a yell in good Australian revealed an aircraft's rubber dinghy with a couple of forms huddled inside. This was *Perth's* Walrus, who had met a Junkers 88 and been shot down that evening.⁷

Embarkation proceeded smoothly in the newcomers, and at 3 a.m. on the 29th, after seeing the beaches cleared, General Freyberg (now in command of all British troops in Greece⁸) and Baillie-Grohman boarded *Ajax* and the force sailed. The bay was brightly lit by fires on shore caused by burning motor transport, a fact which caused Captain McCarthy⁹ of *Ajax* some concern, as the ships were silhouetted and a submarine was believed to be in the vicinity. Suda was reached without incident early on the 29th. There, at 9 a.m., arrived *Auckland*, *Salvia* and *Hyacinth*, which had carried out the embarkation at Kapsali Bay, Kithera. Embarkation was by means of a motor landing craft from *Glenroy*, which was towed back to Suda by *Hyacinth*.

The embarkation at Kalamata, where it was estimated were 7,000 troops, was a failure. *Perth*, *Phoebe*, *Decoy* and *Hasty* left Suda at 9.30 p.m. on the 27th to carry out this operation under the command of Bowyer-Smyth in *Perth*. The force (designated Force "B") proceeded through Kithera Channel and throughout the night of the 27th-28th covered Convoy "GA.14". Shortly after midnight on the 27th *Nubian*, *Hero*, *Hereward* and *Defender* sailed from Suda Bay and joined Bowyer-Smyth in the Mediterranean about sixty miles south-west of Gavdhos Island at 8 a.m. on the 28th. The two cruisers and six destroyers set course for Kalamata so that the final approach would be from the south-west, to arrive at 10 p.m. Meanwhile Pridham-Wippell had heard that in addition to the troops there were 1,500 Yugoslav refugees at Kalamata, and he sailed *Kandahar*, *Kingston* and *Kimberley* from Suda to Kalamata direct to assist in the embarkation. Bowyer-Smyth would thus have two cruisers and nine destroyers under his command there.

At 7.30 p.m. on the 28th, when about twenty miles south of Kalamata, Bowyer-Smyth detached *Hero* from Force "B" to proceed ahead and establish touch with the army ashore. Fires were seen on shore as *Hero* approached the town, and at 8.45 p.m., when she was about three miles

⁷ Hodgkinson, *Before the Tide Turned*, p. 96. *Perth's* aircraft was landed at Suda Bay on 1 January for service at Base, and had been employed as courier and on other Base duties. NOIC Suda Bay says: "During the night 28th-29th two ALC's were dropped by HMS *Ajax* off Kithera and approximately 750 RAF personnel including the crew of HMAS *Perth's* Walrus aircraft were brought in by HM Ships *Auckland*, *Salvia*, *Hyacinth*." (The crew of the aircraft were F-Lt E. V. Beamont, RAAF, Sub-Lt G. F. S. Brian, RN and PO Telegraphist D. M. Bowden, RAN.)

⁸ General Wilson left Greece in the evening of 26th April by flying-boat from Miloi for Suda Bay.

⁹ Admiral Sir Desmond McCarthy, KCB, DSO; RN. Comd HMS *Ajax* 1940-42; Asst Ch of Naval Staff 1944-46; C-in-C South Atlantic 1948-50. B. 1893.

from the harbour, it was clear from "tracer bullets in profusion" that fighting was in progress, and a flashing signal was received from the breakwater: "Bosch in town." Biggs anchored *Hero* close to the beach east of the town, radioed Bowyer-Smyth: "Harbour occupied by Germans, British troops to south-east of town," and landed his 1st Lieutenant (Lieut-Commander Elsworth,¹ R.N.) to find the O.C. Troops, Brigadier Parrington.² "This was a tricky time. The troops on shore were 'trigger happy', and there were no organised units on the beach." At 9.30 p.m. Elsworth reported that the beach was suitable for embarkation, and Biggs made an amplifying signal to Bowyer-Smyth: "Troops collecting on beach east of town. All firing ceased in town. Consider evacuation possible from beach. Brigadier is reporting." Owing to a W/T defect in *Hero*, this signal was not passed until 10.11 p.m. By that time Bowyer-Smyth had turned Force "B", and was some twenty miles south of Kalamata, retiring at 28 knots.

When Bowyer-Smyth received Biggs' first signal at 9.10 p.m., Force "B" was about ten miles from Kalamata, approaching the port at 16 knots. Tracer fire and "big explosions" were seen on shore. Bowyer-Smyth wrote, four days later:

As soon as I saw these explosions I realised that during embarkation Force "B" would be in an extremely hazardous tactical position in the event of attack from seaward. Ships would be silhouetted against explosions and fires on shore, would be embayed and unable to scatter, and there was no covering force in the offing. Taranto was only twelve hours steaming away and with the information the enemy obviously had such an attack was far from improbable.

These factors were considered in a rapid appreciation, coupled with other considerations: that beach embarkation of the estimated numbers without landing craft would be impracticable in the time at disposal; that secrecy had gone; and that "the forces under my command constituted a substantial part of the light forces of the Mediterranean Fleet whose loss would be in the nature of a calamity, particularly in view of recent cruiser losses". Alternatives were weighed: to withdraw the whole force; to commit the whole force to embarkation; to leave the destroyers and withdraw the cruisers. Bowyer-Smyth concluded that "either all must stay or all go. Reluctantly I decided that the number that could be got away did not warrant the substantial risk to an important force." At 9.29 p.m., when about six miles from the anchorage, he reversed course, raised steam for full speed, and retired Force "B" at 28 knots; ordering *Hero* to rejoin, "an order which I hoped he would, as he did, interpret by bringing away any men he could". Subsequently Bowyer-Smyth received two more amplifying signals from Biggs saying that he was sending boats ashore, that there had been no previous night air raids, that the Germans had only light artillery, and that a number of troops could be embarked from beaches south-east of the town. "But the decision had been made by then and they did not in any event alter the arguments on which I had based it."

¹ Lt-Cdr R. F. G. Elsworth, DSC; RN. HMS's *Hero* 1939-41, *Glasgow* 1942-44. B. 5 Jun 1915.

² Brig L. Parrington, MC. Regular soldier; b. Holborough, Kent, Eng, 24 Feb 1890.

All this time Pridham-Wippell was in Suda Bay following events at Kalamata by intercepted signals carrying a varying time lag, as they were not all received direct. It was around 10.30 p.m. when he learned from *Hero's* first signal to *Perth* that events were not going to plan; and he sent on shore asking General Wilson to meet him in *Orion* to advise on the military aspect of a possible further embarkation on the night of the 29th. *Hero's* amplifying signals to *Perth* were intercepted, and Pridham-Wippell concluded

that *Perth* and the remainder of the force were in the vicinity of the beach reorganising embarkation arrangements in accordance with the reports received from *Hero*.

At 10.50 p.m. he signalled Bowyer-Smyth to use his discretion but to make no promises for the following night "and to sail by 3 a.m. on the 29th". But about 11.30 p.m. he received a signal from Bowyer-Smyth stating that he had abandoned the operation, and that Force "B", minus *Hero*, was steering south at 28 knots. It was then about sixty miles from Kalamata—too far for the issuing of fresh instructions to serve any purpose.

Meanwhile *Hero*, at the beach, had lowered boats and started embarking troops. On information he received from Elsworth and a military staff officer from the shore (that the harbour had been mined) Biggs concluded it would be unwise to enter, and requested troop concentration on the beach. Around 10 p.m. he received Bowyer-Smyth's abandonment signal and

came to the conclusion that the Commanding Officer must be in possession of some information of which I did not know, or that he had encountered enemy surface forces.

He decided to close *Perth* to visual signal range and report fully, and recalled his boats and sailed at 10.50 p.m., meanwhile sending his amplifying wireless signals. At 11.15 p.m., however, he intercepted Pridham-Wippell's 10.50 p.m. signal to *Perth*, and *Perth's* position, course and speed signal to Pridham-Wippell. He realised he could not close *Perth*, so "returned to Kalamata to carry out the evacuation as best I could alone". *Hero* anchored again off the beach at 11.50 p.m. and resumed embarkation with both whalers.

Work was hampered by the absence of the Naval Sea Transport Officer ashore, Captain Clark-Hall,³ who was captured with his staff by the Germans. From a number of conflicting reports Biggs gathered that bombing had been intensive on the 28th, and six mines had been dropped in the harbour. At about 6 p.m. a German motorised force of 300 troops with two 60-pounder guns entered the town and captured Clark-Hall and the embarkation staff, whom they sent inland by car. A counter-attack was organised, and by 1 a.m. on the 29th the town was cleared of the enemy. Biggs learned also from Brigadier Parrington that he would be

³ Capt W. C. Clark-Hall, RN. (Comd HMS's *Conflict* 1915, *TB.3* 1916, *Prince* 1916-18.) DSTO, Egypt, 1941; NSTO, Greece, 1941. B. 27 Nov 1888.

unable to hold out after daybreak on the 29th and expose his men to another day's bombing, but told him

to hold out as long as he could as more ships would probably arrive on the night of the 29th-30th.

At 1.10 a.m. on the 29th, *Hero* was joined off the beach by *Kandahar* (Senior Officer), *Kingston* and *Kimberley*. Biggs later wrote:

From the shouts, hails, and replies, it was clear that those on the beaches included a number of Australians. Orders were given for as many as possible to crowd into motor boats and whalers and to swim off to the ship, which was only about 200 yards from the beach. Before we sailed an officer was sent on shore to tell the Brigadier: "We will be coming back!"

The four ships sailed at 2.30 a.m. on the 29th, after embarking a total of 332 troops.⁵ They reached Suda Bay at 8.30 a.m. on the 29th.

When General Wilson learned on the night of the 28th that the Kalamata operation was abandoned, he told Pridham-Wippell that most of the troops there would be forced to surrender the following morning, and suggested that a few destroyers might be sent on the night of 29th-30th to embark any small parties that might still be free. On Cunningham's authority, *Isis* (Senior Officer), *Hero* and *Kimberley* left Suda Bay at 5 p.m. on the 29th on this mission. They embarked a total of thirty-three officers and men in small isolated parties, and learned that the main body had surrendered at 5.30 a.m. on the 29th. The first find on this night was by *Isis*, who picked up a boat load of New Zealanders about ten miles out to sea. Biggs recalled after the war that:

The three ships then steamed close to the shore to the south-eastward of the town, hailing the shore to see if there were any stragglers to be picked up. Answering shouts were usually dealt with by a rifle shot in the direction of the shout in order to judge from the resulting bad language if the straggler was genuine or an enemy. One Australian was identified by asking him "What Matilda was doing".

The operation was repeated by the same three ships on the night of the 30th April, when

a few stragglers were picked up near the town, but an organised body was found ashore about seven miles to the south-eastward. . . . A total of about 200 [actually 202]⁶ officers and men were picked up on this night. Ships returned direct to Port Said—Alexandria being temporarily closed by aircraft mines.

Port Said was reached at 4 p.m. on the 2nd May.

Bowyer-Smyth's conclusion to abandon the Kalamata operation on the 28th was, as Cunningham subsequently remarked, "an unfortunate decision".⁷ It contributed to the loss of some 6,000 troops and 1,500 Yugoslav refugees, who were forced to surrender. Even by boat embarkation many of these could have been taken off, and Bowyer-Smyth's three alternatives did not exhaust the means of effecting such embarkation.

⁵ Embarkations on the night of the 28th-29th were—Monemvasia: *Ajax*, 1,050; *Havock*, 850; *Hotspur*, 800; *Griffin*, 720; *Isis*, 900. Kithera: *Auckland*, *Salvia*, *Hyacinth*, 60 troops, 700 R.A.F., 60 Greek soldiers. Kalamata: *Kandahar*, 126; *Hero*, 134; *Kimberley*, 33; *Kingston*, 39. A total of 5,472.

⁶ 29th April: *Isis*, 7; *Hero*, 13; *Kimberley*, 13. 30th April: *Isis*, 62; *Hero*, 61; *Kimberley*, 79.

⁷ Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 356.

His concern with the safety of his ships as "a substantial part of the light forces of the Mediterranean Fleet whose loss would be in the nature of a calamity" was natural and understandable. It was founded on apprehension of a surface attack from seaward. But Force "B" was committed to the operation by Pridham-Wippell, who was fully alive to the hazards it ran. The fact that he, aware between 10.30 p.m. and 11 p.m. on the 28th of the situation in Kalamata itself, took it for granted that Force "B" was there "reorganising embarkation arrangements in accordance with the reports received from *Hero*", indicates that he did not consider those hazards increased to an extent justifying abandoning the operation. Biggs, at the beach in *Hero* when he learned of Force "B's" retirement, could only assume that Bowyer-Smyth had "information of which I did not know, or that he had encountered enemy surface forces"; both wrong assumptions.

The decisions to retire Force "B" precipitately was apparently reached as the result of visual evidences of fighting on shore, and the scanty information in *Hero's* first signal: "Harbour occupied by Germans. British troops to south-east of town", sharpening Bowyer-Smyth's underlying anxiety regarding the probability of surface attack by superior forces. He made no attempt to get further information from Biggs, and sent him only one signal, that saying the operation was abandoned—which was not dispatched until 9.52 p.m., twenty-three minutes after he had turned Force "B". Within half-an-hour of sending that signal he had *Hero's* amplifying signals⁸ saying that the situation on shore was in hand and that beach embarkation was possible. His comment that this information did not alter the arguments on which the decision to retire was based, is difficult to accept. It is governed by the immediately preceding statement: "But the decision had been made by then"—in itself an admission that the decision was "unfortunate", as undoubtedly it was.

The ships from the Monemvasia and Kithera embarkations began to reach Suda at 7.30 a.m. on the 29th. Troops were redistributed into transports, and at 11 a.m. Pridham-Wippell sailed convoy "GA.15" for Alexandria via Kaso Strait. The convoy, of seven ships, together with its escort and covering force, carried a total of 6,232 troops and 4,699 others including Italian prisoners-of-war; British merchant seamen; naval, Fleet Air Arm, and Royal Air Force officers and men; civilians; walking wounded; and nursing sisters.¹ Force "B" from Kalamata joined Pridham-Wippell at 2 p.m. on the 29th, the two cruisers, *Hasty*, *Hereward* and

⁸ *Hero's* amplifying signals, with times of origin and receipt, were recorded by Bowyer-Smyth as: 2125 received at 2210: "Troops collecting on beach east of town. All firing ceased in town. Consider evacuation possible from beach. Brigadier is reporting." 2134 received at 2203: "Germans in town, some of our forces attacking, remainder collecting at beach south-east of town. Officers and signalmen have been landed there, made contact with Senior Officer. Am sending boats, no air raids by night previously." 2154 received at 2217: "Germans have only light craft artillery. Consider a certain number of men can be evacuated from beach two miles south-east of town."

¹ Convoy: *Delane*, *Thurland Castle*, *Comlebank*, *Corinthia*, *Itria*, *Ionla*, *Brambleleaf*, carrying a total of 9,638. Escort: *Carlisle*, *Auckland*, *Kandahar*, *Kingston*, *Decoy*, *Defender*, *Hyacinth*, carrying a total of 200 troops. Covering Force: *Orion*, *Ajax*, *Perth*, *Phoebe*, *Hasty*, *Hereward*, *Nubian*, carrying a total of 1,093 troops, and naval officers and men (mostly ex *York*).

Nubian forming part of the covering force while *Decoy* and *Defender* went on the convoy screen.

On the night of 30th April-1st May *Hotspur* and *Havock* went from Suda Bay to Milos Island and there embarked 700 British and Palestinian troops. The two ships proceeded via Kaso Strait to Port Said.

Meanwhile, at 3 p.m. on the 29th Rawlings (Rear-Admiral 1st Battle Squadron) in *Barham*, with *Valiant*, *Formidable*, the five Australian destroyers and *Greyhound*, left Alexandria. At 6 a.m. on the 30th, about eighty miles south of Kaso Strait, they met Pridham-Wippell's covering force and took over close escort of "GA.15". *Perth*, *Phoebe* and *Nubian* joined Rawlings (who was about this time joined also by *Ilex* from Alexandria and *Juno* and *Jaguar*² from Malta) and Pridham-Wippell and the remainder of his force proceeded to Alexandria. Convoy "GA.15" (which had been unsuccessfully attacked by enemy motor torpedo boats for about four hours during the night in Kaso Strait) was sighted at 7 a.m., and the Battle Squadron remained in close touch all day. At 7 p.m. *Perth* and *Nubian* were detached to join the escort, and "GA.15" proceeded to Alexandria, where it arrived without further incident on the 1st May. Rawlings took his force south of Crete in distant support of *Isis*, *Hero* and *Kimberley* at Kalamata and of *Havock* and *Hotspur* in the Aegean. At noon on the 1st May "*Stuart* and one aircraft commenced depth-charging a mine, each apparently thinking the other was attacking a submarine". On the 2nd one of *Formidable's* aircraft force-landed in the sea and her crew were picked up by *Waterhen*. The force was to return to Alexandria on the 2nd May but could not do so because the harbour was closed by mines. The Australian destroyers were detached and entered that evening, but the big ships kept to sea and, after an uneventful twenty-four hours, "crept into harbour at 7 p.m." on the 3rd.

This ended the withdrawal from Greece. It was an operation carried out, in the main successfully, under great handicaps. The constantly changing military situation, the difficulties of communication, the damage to and loss of ships, made hurriedly contrived improvisation necessary. In darkness, embarking off open beaches with no navigational marks to define difficult anchorages, and often lacking adequate charts, the ships did wonders. This applies especially to the merchant ships—including Dutch vessels—less equipped in training, armament, and navigational instruments for such ventures than their naval companions, but made equal to them in achievement by the seamanship and determination of their people. Three other factors contributed in large measure to success. The fine discipline, fortitude, and patience of the troops; the failure of the enemy to bomb the embarkation beaches and ships by night; and the inactivity of the Italian Fleet, which made no attempt to interfere. "I feel," wrote Cunningham after the war, "that the episode is one to which the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy can look back with pride." As the

² HMS *Jaguar*, destroyer (1939), 1,760 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk by German submarine in E Mediterranean, 26 Mar 1942.

remarks of those in the ships repeatedly show, it was a pride not only in themselves, but also in those whom they had come to succour.

There was one more embarkation, not included in Pridham-Wippell's final figure of 50,662 embarked, that of four officers and 128 other ranks of the A.I.F. from the island of Chios (in the Aegean near the Turkish coast). News of their presence in Chios reached the British Naval Attaché at Ankara (Captain O'Donnell³) and he was instructed to arrange their embarkation. This was effected, after some difficulty, in the Danube tug *Cecedena* which, with a crew of mixed nationalities under Lieut-Commander Wells, R.N.V.R., sailed from Turkey early on the 2nd May and embarked the party later that day, a few hours before the island was occupied by the Germans. They were taken in *Cecedena* to Cesme in Turkey where, with eighteen more Australians who had reached the Turkish coast at Dikili, they were transferred to the Greek yacht *Cala Mara*, in which they were taken to Cyprus, reaching Famagusta on the 11th May.

³ Capt G. E. M. O'Donnell, DSO; RN. (HMS's *New Zealand* 1914-17, *Vendetta* 1917-18). British Naval Attaché, Ankara, 1939-42; comd HMS's *Enterprise* 1942-43, *Malaya* 1943, *Valiant* 1943-45. B. 31 Aug 1893.

CHAPTER 9

CRETE

WITH the German occupation of Greece the fate of Crete became of major importance to both sides. In the Eastern Mediterranean the island occupied a position analagous to that of Malta in the central sea.¹ It was a shield to and provided a valuable fuelling base on the British east-west communications, and facilitated the passing of Malta convoys. On the flank of the Italian supply lines to Libya it constituted, in British hands, a further threat to them. Situated athwart the entrance to the Aegean, its possession exerted considerable influence on the control of that sea and of the Black Sea oil route Constanta-Corinth-Italy, vital to the Axis. This influence could have been extended southwards to British detriment with the island's occupation by a strong and vigorous hostile naval power. It was not, however, this thought which primarily influenced the German leaders' deliberations, but the fear that the island would be used as an air base from which to raid the Rumanian oilfields which made them regard its denial to the British as essential. Its use by Germany as a stepping stone to Egypt was a secondary consideration, and was proposed to Goering by General Lohr, commander of the *Fourth Air Fleet*, on the 15th April 1941. On 21st April the proposal was submitted to Hitler. It provided for the seizure of Crete by parachute and airborne troops as the first phase of an airborne offensive against the Suez Canal via Cyprus. Hitler approved, and on the 25th April, the day on which the first of the troops withdrawn from Greece were landed at Suda Bay, issued Directive 28, "Operation Merkur", which ordered the German occupation of Crete for use "as an air base against Britain in the eastern Mediterranean". The operation was entrusted to the *Fourth Air Fleet* with the *VIII* and General Student's *XI Air Corps* under command (the *VIII Air Corps* a purely air formation, and the *XI* an airborne troop formation) and was to be supported by the *Twelfth Army*, and by the Admiral Commanding the South-Eastern Area.² The German development of airborne and parachute forces was well known to the British, who anticipated their use in an attack on Crete. Towards the end of April, intelligence of "the movement and excitement of the German *XI Air Corps* [in Greece] and the frantic collection of small craft in Greek Harbours"³ confirmed anticipation, and indicated that the probable date for attack would be

¹ In a telegram from London to the Australian Government on 8 May 1941, the Australian High Commissioner, Mr Bruce, gave the views of the Chiefs of Staff Committee as: "General feeling is that Crete can be held but for the present only to the extent of denying it to the enemy although later as defences strengthen it may be made operational base similar to Malta."

² In Feb 1941, Hitler approved the appointments of naval shore commanders at Salonika, Volos, and Piraeus, and of an admiral (Commanding Admiral, Balkans) "to achieve proper coordination between the naval units operating in the entire south-eastern area and to guard all naval interests there". The "Admiral, South-East" took up his appointment in the second half of March. *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1941*.

³ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. III (1950), p. 240.

about the 17th May.⁴ During the intervening period, efforts were made to reinforce the island with combat troops, to land supplies of stores and munitions, and to strengthen the defences.

About this time the Mediterranean Fleet received reinforcements. The 5th Destroyer Flotilla, *Kelly*, *Kipling*, *Kelvin*, *Kashmir*, *Jackal* and *Jersey*,⁵ arrived under the command of Captain Lord Louis Mountbatten⁶ as Captain (D) in *Kelly*, and was based on Malta where, shortly after its arrival, *Jersey* was mined and sunk in the entrance to Grand Harbour. The cruiser *Dido*⁷ also arrived; and Australian representation with the fleet was strengthened by two new destroyers, *Napier* and *Nizam*. It will be remembered (Chapter 3) that in May 1940 the Commonwealth Government approved an Admiralty proposal that ships' companies of the Australian destroyers in the Mediterranean should man new ships building in Britain. Arrangements had been made, and new drafts from Australia replaced the trained men who left the old destroyers for the new ships. In August 1940 the Admiralty asked the Naval Board if a Captain, R.A.N., could be made available as Captain (D) of the new ships (five of the "N" class),⁸ and were informed that no suitable R.A.N. Captain with destroyer experience was available other than Waller. "If Captain Waller is appointed to *Napier* and a captain is required for *Stuart* it will be necessary to provide an officer of that rank from the Royal Navy." In the circumstances Waller could not be spared from the Mediterranean, and the following month the Admiralty nominated Captain Arliss⁹ as Captain (D) of the 7th Flotilla. He commissioned *Napier* at Fairfield's yard on the Clyde on 28th November 1940. Her first task, during her working up period, was to transport Mr and Mrs Churchill from Thurso to the new battleship *King George V*¹ in Scapa Flow (when they farewelled Lord Halifax² on his departure in that ship for the United States as British Ambassador in January 1941) and later to return them to the mainland. The second ship of the flotilla, *Nizam*, was commissioned at John Brown's yard, Clydebank, on 19th December 1940 by Lieut-Commander Clark.³

⁴ When Hitler gave his consent to the operation on 21 Apr he instructed that the attack was to begin on 15 May. Transport and supply difficulties, and the shortage of suitable airfields in Greece, caused postponement to 20 May.

⁵ Destroyers (1939), 1,690 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts. (*Jersey* sunk at Malta 2 May 1941, *Kelly* and *Kashmir* off Crete 23 May 1941, *Kipling* and *Jackal* in E Mediterranean 11 and 12 May 1942).

⁶ Admiral Rt Hon Earl Mountbatten, KG, GCSI, GCIE, GCVO, KCB, DSO; RN. (1914-18: HMS's *Lion*, *Queen Elizabeth* and submarines.) Comd HMS *Illustrious* 1941; Chief of Combined Ops 1942-43; Supreme Allied Cdr, SE Asia, 1943-46. Viceroy of India 1947, Governor-General 1947-48; C-in-C, Mediterranean, 1952-53, Allied Forces in Medit 1953-55; First Sea Lord and CNS since 1955. B. 25 Jun 1900.

⁷ HMS *Dido*, cruiser (1940), 5,450 tons, ten 5.25-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 33 kts.

⁸ *Napier*, *Nizam*, *Norman*, *Nepal*, *Nestor* (1941), 1,690 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts. The ships were manned by the RAN, designated "HMA" Ships, and appeared as such in the RN and RAN Navy Lists; but they remained the property of HM Government. (*Nestor* was sunk in Mediterranean 15 Jun 1942.)

⁹ Vice-Adm S. H. T. Arliss, CB, DSO; RN. Comd HMS *Salisbury* 1918-19, HMAS *Napier* and Capt (D) 7 Flotilla 1940-42; Cmdre (D) Eastern Fleet Flotillas 1942-44; comd HMS *Berwick* 1944-46. B. 11 Jul 1895. Died 6 Nov 1954.

¹ HMS *King George V*, battleship (1940), 35,000 tons, ten 14-in and sixteen 5.25-in guns, 28.5 kts.

² Rt Hon Earl Halifax, KG, OM, GCSI, GCIE. (1915-17: served as major in France.) Viceroy of India 1926-31; Sec of State for Foreign Affairs 1938-40; Ambassador to USA 1941-46. B. 16 Apr 1881.

³ Capt M. J. Clark, DSC; RAN. Comd HMAS's *Yarra* 1939, *Doomba* 1939-40, *Nizam* 1941-43, *Warramunga* 1945-46. Of Richmond, Tas; b. Franklin, Tas, 30 Mar 1906.

After working up exercises, fleet duties, and some weeks of North Atlantic convoy work, *Napier* and *Nizam* sailed for the Mediterranean via the Cape. They parted company at Aden on the 30th April, and *Nizam* swept ahead of US Convoy 10A (*Queen Elizabeth* and *Queen Mary* carrying 10,000 A.I.F. troops and 1,000 R.A.A.F.) through the Red Sea to Suez, where they arrived on 3rd May. *Nizam* went on through the Canal, and reached Port Said the following day.

Further reinforcements, the battleship *Queen Elizabeth*⁴ and the cruisers *Naiad*⁵ and *Fiji*, joined the fleet from the west in a joint convoy operation similar to those which had been the vehicle of previous accessions of strength. In this operation, which lasted from 6th to 12th May, and in which *Perth* and the newly-arrived *Nizam* took part, the Mediterranean Fleet covered the passage of two supply convoys from Alexandria to Malta, and south of that island took over from Force "H" the reinforcements which had accompanied it from Gibraltar, and a convoy ("Tiger") of four merchant ships loaded with motor transport and tanks for Egypt.⁶ The fleet was accompanied by *Formidable*, but nature provided effective air cover in the shape of low overcast which safeguarded the ships from air attack in the danger area south of Malta; and a moonlight attack during the return journey to Alexandria on the 10th May was beaten off without loss to fleet or convoy. During the westward passage *Ajax*, *Imperial*, *Havock* and *Hotspur* were detached and effectively bombarded the harbour and shipping at Benghazi. This operation was repeated by Mountbatten's destroyers, which accompanied the fleet thus far on the eastward passage, and then returned to Malta. Fleet and convoy reached Alexandria safely on the 12th May, and there *Nizam* found *Napier* awaiting her.

Consequent upon the arrival at this time of two new flag officers, Rear-Admirals King⁷ and Glennie,⁸ flag appointments in the fleet were rearranged. Pridham-Wippell assumed command of the battle fleet, with his flag in *Queen Elizabeth*; Rawlings became Rear-Admiral 7th Cruiser Squadron flying his flag in *Orion*; King, in *Naiad*, became Rear-Admiral 15th Cruiser Squadron; and Glennie Rear-Admiral (D) in *Dido*. These were the men who, under the direction of Cunningham ashore at Alexandria, were to carry out the operations afloat in the battle for Crete.

II

Crete is an island 160 miles long east and west, with a north and south width varying between 35 and seven-and-a-half miles. A mountain spine,

⁴ HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, battleship (1915, refitted 1937), 31,000 tons, eight 15-in and eight 6-in guns, 24 kts.

⁵ HMS *Naiad*, cruiser (1940), 5,450 tons, ten 5.25-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 33 kts; sunk by German submarine in E Mediterranean, 11 Mar 1942.

⁶ "Tiger" originally consisted of five merchant ships but one, *Empire Song* (12,656 tons), struck a mine when entering the Sicilian Narrows from the west, and subsequently sank.

⁷ Admiral E. L. S. King, CB, MVO; RN. Comd 15 Cruiser Sqn 1941; an Asst Ch of Naval Staff 1941-42; PNLO to Allied Navies 1943. Of Ruan Minor, Cornwall, Eng; b. Windom, USA, 22 Feb 1889.

⁸ Admiral Sir Irvine Glennie, KCB; RN. Comd HMS *Achilles* 1936-39, HMS *Hood* 1939-41, Destroyers, Mediterranean, 1941-42, Destroyers, Home Fleet, 1943-44; C-in-C America and West Indies 1945-46. B. 1892.

steep-to on the southern side, runs most of its length. South to the Mediterranean Sea the island presents an inhospitable back, a rugged, harbourless coast. Its welcome lies to the north, with its front door a good, though undeveloped harbour at Suda Bay, and some lesser havens along its length. In the north, too, is the only country suitable for airfields; and it was at Suda Bay and the airfields—Maleme to the west and Retimo and Heraklion to the east—that the British garrison was deployed. Only two or three roads, and those generally degenerating to tracks unsuitable for motor transport over some miles of their southern extremities, connect the inhospitable south with the welcoming north. The nearest neighbouring land is that of islands, Antikithera some twenty miles to the west and Kaso some thirty to the east. In May 1941 both of these were in enemy hands. They were unsuitable for the mounting of an attack on Crete, but formed the horns of a hostile crescent which embraced the island and covered with strong air power both the northern front door through which seaborne supplies had to pass, and the side entrances from the Mediterranean leading to that door. The enemy base for airborne attack lay opposite the front door, some 150 miles distant in the Athens area. The British base, for supply and for seaborne defence, lay nearly three times that distance away at Alexandria, opposite the unwelcoming back. As Cunningham wrote: "From the point of view of defence it would have suited us much better if the island could have been turned upside down."⁹

Yet with all the disadvantages it was generally felt by the British commanders that the island could be defended successfully with the existing resources. In his subsequent dispatch on the Battle of Crete, Cunningham wrote:

It was known that airborne invasion of the island was impending; but it appeared almost inconceivable that airborne invasion alone could succeed against forewarned troops, that seaborne support was inevitable and that the destruction of troop convoys would win the day.

Destruction of convoys was not to be on the one side. The enemy air power in the area was great; the British was pitifully weak and soon to become non-existent. The reinforcement and supply of the island was seriously hampered by air attack during the brief period between the withdrawal from Greece and the German assault on Crete, to an extent contributing to the final outcome.

The problem in the few days prior to the attack was threefold—reinforcement with combat troops, the removal of some thousands of "useless mouths", and the bringing in of supplies and munitions. At the end of April there were rations in the island for 30,000 for sixty days; but the arrival of 25,000 withdrawn from Greece brought the number of troops up to 45,000, in addition to which there were some 15,000 prisoners of war. Reinforcement with combat troops and their equipment was only partially successful. It had been intended to build Suda Bay up as a naval base, and to set up a complete Mobile Naval Base Defence Organisation.

⁹ Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 358.

This organisation, of 5,300 Royal Marines with anti-aircraft guns, search-lights, booms, nets, mines and other equipment, had arrived in the Mediterranean via the Cape; but at the end of April was in Haifa restowing its ships which had been stowed in England "in a manner which bore no relation to the priority in which all the various items would be used".¹ On the 9th May 2,000 M.N.B.D.O. Marines with their anti-aircraft guns arrived at Suda, "but the danger of losing ships through enemy air action was considered too great to allow any further M.N.B.D.O. storeships to be sent to Crete".² A week later *Gloucester* and *Fiji* disembarked at Heraklion the 2nd Battalion of the Leicester Regiment with their full equipment; and during the night 18th-19th May *Glengyle*, escorted by *Coventry*, *Auckland*, *Waterhen* and *Voyager*, took 700 men of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders from Alexandria to Timbakion on the south coast, whence they travelled overland to Heraklion.

The withdrawal from Greece imposed an increase in the numbers to be fed and maintained in Crete without providing any great increase in fighting strength, and the question of supplies was a mounting anxiety for the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda Bay, Captain Morse.³ Every opportunity was taken to send away unwanted troops, prisoners and civilians, but new arrivals kept numbers in the island near the same level. When the German assault began on 20th May Crete's defenders numbered approximately 40,000, comprising 15,000 United Kingdom troops, 7,700 New Zealand, 6,500 Australian and 10,800 uniformed Greeks. Meanwhile enemy air attack, against convoys at sea and ships in Suda Bay, increased in scale and intensity; ships were sunk on passage and also in harbour, where the constant air attacks made discharging of cargo slow and difficult. Labour was a problem. As the scale of air attack increased the supply of civilian Greek, and later Cypriot, labour dwindled and became less reliable. Finally the Australian and New Zealand brigades supplied a dock company and additional labour, and the men "gave excellent service under the most trying conditions", as Morse reported.⁴

Between the 9th and 14th May two convoys, "AN.30" and "ANF.30", the first of three and the second of four ships, reached Suda Bay; and two, "AS.30" of thirteen ships and "ASF.31" of two ships, sailed thence for Egypt. Australian destroyers were among the escorts of all four convoys.⁵ "AN.30" was originally of four ships which sailed on the 6th May, one from Haifa, two from Port Said, and one from Alexandria, escorted by *Auckland*, *Grimsby*, *Flamingo* and *Vampire*, to rendezvous with *Stuart* and *Waterhen* at 11.30 a.m. on the 7th. Due to a variety of circumstances, Waller in *Stuart* did not get his convoy and escorts formed up until 6.30

¹ Cunningham, p. 358.

² Cunningham, Despatch, *The Battle of Crete*.

³ Vice-Adm Sir Anthony Morse, KBE, CB, DSO; RN. FO Northern Area, Mediterranean 1944-45; FO Malaya 1945-46. B. 16 Oct 1892.

⁴ During the period from 29 April to 20 May some 15,000 tons of army stores were off-loaded at Suda Bay from fifteen ships, and eight ships were sunk or damaged in the harbour by air attack. (Cunningham, Despatch.)

⁵ Australian destroyers with the convoys were: "AN.30" *Stuart*, *Waterhen*, *Vampire*; "ANF.30" *Stuart*, *Vendetta*; "AS.30" *Voyager*, *Vampire*; "ASF.31" *Stuart*, *Vendetta*.

p.m., matters being made difficult by the fact that one of his charges, *Rawnsley* (5,000 tons), could not steam at more than eight knots while another, *Lossiebank* (5,627 tons) could not steam at *less* than eleven. At this juncture *Stuart's* engines broke down, and Waller had to return to Alexandria, and carried out a six-hour attack on a submarine on the way.⁶ The convoy proceeded north in charge of *Auckland*. At 6.45 p.m. on the 8th, just south of Kaso Strait, *Rawnsley* was torpedoed in an air attack. *Rawnsley* was taken in tow by *Grimsby* escorted by *Waterhen*, and was anchored in Ierapetra Bay on the south coast of Crete. Here she was bombed on the night of the 11th, and sank the following morning. Three other ships of these two convoys, *Widnes*⁷ of "AN.30" and *Dalesman* (6,200 tons) and *Logician* (5,993 tons) of "ANF.30" were lost by air attack in Suda Bay.

The two southbound convoys reached Egypt without loss, though the eccentric *Lossiebank*, one of the two ships in "ASF.31" (the other was the Dutch *Nieuw Zeeland*, of 11,069 tons) had a narrow escape. The cruiser *Dido* was senior officer of escort, and had on board Greek gold to the value of £7,000,000 which she had embarked at Suda Bay. *Lossiebank* was carrying 2,000 troops. Just before daylight on the 15th May in the northern end of Kaso Strait, *Lossiebank* broke down, first on one engine, then on both. *Dido* sent *Nieuw Zeeland* on ahead with *Stuart*. At 6.24 a.m. *Lossiebank* told *Dido* she would be ready in fifteen minutes. "I replied," reported *Dido's* captain, who was acutely conscious of the bullion he was himself carrying and of the 2,000 troops in *Lossiebank*, and who did not relish being stopped so close to Italian airfields, "if you are not ready then I will come alongside, disembark troops and sink ship. Fortunately she was proceeding with both engines within ten minutes." At 11.45 a.m. the convoy was attacked by five Italian bombers from Rhodes. They concentrated on *Lossiebank*. "Bombs appeared to straddle her on all sides and she was obscured from view but emerged from clouds of spray apparently undamaged." Shortly afterwards the 1st Battle Squadron was met and provided cover, and the convoy reached Alexandria without further incident.

The Germans also were concerned with the question of seaborne supplies for Crete, which would arise for them once their attack began. By arrangement with the Italians, the Aegean was placed under the command of the German "Admiral Southeast", whose area of responsibility was defined as the east coast of Greece including the Gulf of Athens, and such islands off the coast and in the Aegean as were occupied by German troops. The Peloponnese and the west coast of Greece came under the command of Italy. The Italian naval staff agreed to provide some destroyers and smaller vessels and, in addition, to place their naval forces in the Dodecanese, temporarily at the disposal of the Admiral Southeast. All these

⁶ The attack was apparently unsuccessful. No Italian submarine was sunk between 31 March and 27 June 1941.

⁷ HMS *Widnes*, minesweeper (1918), 710 tons, one 4-in gun, 16 kts; bombed and beached in Suda Bay, Crete, 20 May 1941.

Italian naval forces were under the command of an Italian Chief of Staff, Captain Count Peccori-Giraldi, who was attached to the Admiral South-east.⁸ German attempts to persuade the Italians to commit their main fleet in support of the operation were, however, unsuccessful.

The German airborne attack was scheduled to begin on the 20th May, and it was planned that the first wave should occupy the airfield at Maleme and the British positions at adjacent Canea and Suda Bay in the morning, and that the second wave should occupy the eastern airfields in the afternoon. Follow-up by sea was to be by a flotilla of motor sailing vessels at Canea on the evening of the 21st, and by a second flotilla at Heraklion twenty-four hours later. A flotilla of steamers was to proceed to Suda Bay as soon as the harbour was in German hands. In preparation for these seaborne movements the island of Milos, eighty miles north of Suda Bay, was occupied as a naval base, and the Admiral Southeast formed two motor sailing flotillas totalling sixty-three ships, and two steamer flotillas totalling seven merchant ships. The smaller vessels were loaded with an army battalion, air force troops, pack animals, ammunition and supplies; the steamers with tanks, heavy guns, heavy equipment and ammunition and supplies. To protect the flotillas Peccori-Giraldi had two destroyers, twelve torpedo boats, and a number of speed boats and minesweepers—and strong air support. It was the task of the British navy to prevent any such seaborne landings.

III

Indications to the British were that the German assault on Crete (where General Freyberg had been placed in command on shore) would begin about the 15th May, and as soon as the fleet got back to Alexandria from the TIGER operation, moves to meet the attack were put in hand. Cunningham was faced with a number of problems. Continuous air attacks from the 14th May made Suda Bay untenable as a naval base and reduced serviceable Royal Air Force aircraft on the Cretan airfields to seven, which were withdrawn to Egypt on the 19th. Losses and wear and tear in earlier operations had reduced *Formidable's* serviceable aircraft to four, with no reserves of machines or flying crews—a condition which could not be remedied before the 25th May, and then only on a limited scale. Anti-aircraft ammunition was in short supply, and on the 13th May "the remaining stocks of 5.25-inch and 4.5-inch were now down to only three-quarters of the outfit required for the fleet".¹ Cunningham knew, therefore, that he would have to operate, without air cover and with the need to conserve anti-aircraft ammunition, in an area which, dominated by enemy air power, was 420 miles from his own base. Nor could he disregard the possibility of intervention by the Italian fleet.

Any interception of a seaborne attack would have to be north of Crete, it being assumed that the most likely places for attempted landings would

⁸ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 20 Apr 1941.

¹ Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 363.

be Canea, Retimo, and Heraklion. It was undesirable unnecessarily to expose ships to air attack in the Aegean by day, but necessary to have them there at the time a seaborne assault was attempted. There was also the fuelling problem. Cunningham met the situation by disposing his forces in five groups: a battle squadron west of Crete to provide heavy cover; three groups of cruisers and destroyers to carry out night sweeps north of Crete and retire from the Aegean in the daytime unless circumstances demanded their presence north of the island; and a reserve battle squadron at Alexandria. Air reconnaissance ("but it was very thin") was arranged to give intelligence of any German moves by sea.

The first British move was on the 14th May, when Pridham-Wippell in *Queen Elizabeth* with *Barham*, accompanied by cruiser and destroyer forces, sailed from Alexandria. During the 15th they covered convoy "ASF.31" south of Kaso Strait. The following day patrolling dispositions were made, the battle squadron west of Crete, the three light forces, two in the west and one in the east, sweeping the respective straits in readiness for eventualities. They remained in position without any enemy surface move until the 18th, when they returned to Alexandria to fuel.² Pridham-Wippell was relieved by Rawlings in *Warspite* with *Valiant*, *Ajax* and destroyers; the other forces made quick dashes to Alexandria and out again, and were back in position by the 19th, and further sweeps were carried out both in the west and east that night.

At daylight on the 20th May Rawlings, with *Warspite*, *Valiant*, *Napier*, *Kimberley*, *Isis*, *Janus*, *Griffin* and *Imperial*, was to the west of Crete. At 9 a.m. he was joined by Glennie in *Dido*, with *Orion*, *Ajax* and destroyers, which force had been sweeping Antikithera Strait. *Gloucester* and *Fiji*, having fuelled at Alexandria, were on their way to join Rawlings. In the east, King in *Naiad*, with *Perth*, *Kandahar*, *Nubian*, *Kingston* and *Juno*, was south of Kaso Strait.

From his headquarters at Suda, Morse, the N.O.I.C., could see Canea wireless station and the hills which hid Maleme beyond. From 8 a.m. on the 20th he watched heavy German bombing south of Canea and over Maleme, followed by intense machine-gun attacks on adjacent areas. At 9 a.m. he saw parachute troops dropping south and west of Canea, and concentrations of troop carriers and gliders in the direction of Maleme. From 11.45 a.m. and throughout the afternoon and evening there was heavy dive bombing and machine-gunning of Suda Bay and its defences. The assault at Heraklion, some sixty miles to the east, began four hours after that at Maleme, with a heavy dive bombing attack followed at 4 p.m. by two hours' intensive bombing and "a terrific machine-gun attack from the air which lasted about an hour. It is estimated that 400 planes were over the town between 1600 and 1900".³ A few minutes after 7 p.m. Captain Macdonald,⁴ the Naval Officer-in-Charge, watched "large numbers

² Some destroyers with the battle squadrons did not return to Alexandria but were fuelled at sea from the battleships.

³ Capt M. H. S. Macdonald, RN, NOIC Heraklion, Letters of Proceedings, May 1941.

⁴ Capt M. H. S. Macdonald, DSO, OBE; RN. (HMS's *Acteon* 1915-16, *Dublin* 1916-17.) NOIC, Suda Bay 1940-41, Heraklion 1941, Cypriot Ports 1941-46. B. 18 Aug 1879. Died 19 Apr 1951.

of low flying planes approaching from the sea". They dropped parachute troops to the west of the town and on the airfield. About the same time parachute troops descended also at Retimo. By the evening of the 20th the German airborne assault on Crete was well under way, and meanwhile the attempted seaborne assault was in preparation. Throughout the day the Maleme motor sailing flotilla of twenty-five ships, which had left Piraeus, battled against strong head winds as it made for Milos. It reached the advanced naval base there during the night, in readiness for its operation on the 21st.

As soon as he learned that the attack on Crete had started, Cunningham issued instructions for night sweeps in the Aegean by the light forces. As a result of air sightings of the Maleme flotilla, these instructions were amplified to meet an expected seaborne attempt during the night 20th-21st. King was instructed to cover the vicinity of Heraklion, and Glennie to guard the Maleme-Canea-Kisamos Bay area. King's force passed Kaso Strait on the evening of the 20th, where it was unsuccessfully attacked first by torpedo bombers and later by six motor torpedo boats which were driven off, and some damaged, by *Juno*, *Kandahar*, and *Naiad*. During the night the force investigated false reports of a seaborne landing at Heraklion, and retired through Kaso Strait (where it was joined by *Calcutta*) in the early forenoon without further incident. In the west, Glennie's force sighted nothing, and retired on Rawlings during the forenoon of the 21st. Another force, Mack (Captain (D) of the 14th Flotilla), in *Jervis* with *Nizam* and *Ilex*, passed through Kaso Strait late on the 20th and between 2.42 and 2.45 a.m. on the 21st bombarded the airfield on Scarpanto, afterwards fruitlessly searching Pegadia Bay on that island for enemy shipping. It then retired to Alexandria to fuel. Throughout the 21st all forces south and west of Crete were subjected to heavy air attacks. In Glennie's force *Ajax* was damaged by a near-miss. King's force was bombed continuously from 9.50 a.m. to 1.40 p.m., and shortly before 1 p.m. lost *Juno*, which received direct hits and sank in two minutes.⁵ The battle squadron suffered no damage, but the high expenditure of anti-aircraft ammunition caused Rawlings to warn the fleet of the need for economy.

The activity of the British early on the 21st caused the Admiral South-east to alter his plans. He had reported to General Headquarters of *XI Air Corps* that the Maleme flotilla (whose heavy arms and ammunition and additional mountain battalions were urgently needed) had been ordered to reach the coast of Crete on the 21st "regardless of enemy fleet movements". Early that day it sailed from Milos under the escort of the Italian destroyer *Lupo*,⁶ but at 10 a.m. was ordered back to harbour when the admiral learned of the presence of the British ships. Later reconnaissance reported no British ships north of Crete, and the commanding

⁵ The Germans thought their score was higher, and a report of *Fourth Air Fleet* (28 Nov 1941) stated that "Units of Flying Corps 8 sank one destroyer and severely damaged another as well as two cruisers", and that during the 21st bomber units from around Attica, Stukas from Scarpanto, and Italian air force units from Rhodes scored "3 direct hits on cruisers, one direct hit on a destroyer, one hit on a steamer, and two other cruisers believed damaged".

⁶ *Lupo*, Italian destroyer (1938), 679 tons, three 3.9-in guns, four 18-in torp tubes, 34 kts.

officer of *Lupo* said that he could reach Maleme before dark. The flotilla set off again at noon. Meanwhile the second (Heraklion) flotilla was on passage from Piraeus. At this stage a further attempt was made to persuade the Italian fleet to put to sea "to pin down British warships away from Crete"; but the authorities in Rome again refused.⁷

During the 21st British air reconnaissance reported the southward move of the Maleme flotilla from Milos, and in the evening *Glennie* in *Dido*, with *Orion*, *Ajax*, *Janus*, *Kimberley*, *Hasty* and *Hereward* moved in through the Antikithera Channel, shooting down two enemy aircraft without damage to themselves in a sharp attack at 7.30 p.m. In the east King, whose force was now joined by *Carlisle*, passed north through Kaso Strait at midnight and swept along the north coast of Crete.

Meanwhile the Maleme flotilla, delayed by strong head winds, was belying the statement of *Lupo's* captain that he would reach Crete before dark. At 11.30 p.m. it was still some eighteen miles north of Canea, steering south; and here, at this time, it met *Glennie's* force steering east at 28 knots, the cruisers in line ahead, the destroyers spread to screen and broaden the search. *Janus*, on *Dido's* port bow, was first to sight the enemy. *Glennie* led his cruisers round to the north and encountered *Lupo*. The Italian passed ahead and close down the starboard side of *Dido* and *Orion*, making smoke, firing torpedoes, and receiving bursts of fire from the cruisers. She then cut in between *Orion* and *Ajax*, and "was finished off by the latter with a complete broadside up the stern".⁸ For two hours *Glennie's* force manoeuvred in the neighbourhood engaging the ships of the flotilla.

When illuminated they were seen to be crowded with German troops and to be flying Greek colours. The crews, obviously pressed men, standing on deck waving white flags, and it was distasteful having to destroy them in company with their callous masters. . . . In all one or two steamers, at least a dozen caiques, a small pleasure steamer and a steam yacht were engaged and either sunk or left burning, beside the destroyer blown up.⁹

By 2 a.m. on the 22nd there were no more enemy vessels in sight, and after a further sweep to the east and north *Glennie*, short of anti-aircraft ammunition and anticipating heavy attacks at daylight, withdrew, and rejoined Rawlings at 8 a.m. It was estimated that about 4,000 German troops were in the ships sunk by the force.¹

⁷ Earlier in the year (March) the Italians had told the Germans that unless they received fuel oil from Germany "the big ships will have to be inactivated in June of this year and the submarines in Feb 1942". The Chief of Staff, Armed Forces High Command (Keitel), said that examination showed the Italians had 600,000 tons of fuel oil, "more than we have ourselves"; which made Raeder wonder "whether the 600,000 tons actually exist or whether the Italians gave this figure merely because it was the one that had been quoted to the Duce". *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 18 Mar 1941.

⁸ *Lupo* was severely damaged but did not sink, and took part in the subsequent rescue of German troops from the sea.

⁹ *Glennie*, Letter of Proceedings, "Operations off Crete 19th-23rd May 1941". Dated 4 Jun 1941.

¹ This estimate was excessive as was the implied figure of casualties inflicted. From German records available since the war, it is now known that the total strength of the enemy convoy was 2,331, and consisted of *III Bn 100 Mtn Regt*, *Heavy Weapons Groups* and part of *II AA Regt*. The report of *Air Fleet 4* stated: "Due to the courageous action of the *Lupo* in firing torpedoes at the enemy from a range of 200 metres, although she herself received 18 direct hits which put her out of action, and to the scattered formation of our ships, only a small portion of the

While Glennie's force was engaged with the Maleme flotilla, King's cruisers and destroyers were sweeping the north coast of Crete from Kaso Strait. At 4 a.m. on the 22nd they were off Heraklion, whence they swept north-westward in search of enemy convoys. At 8.30 the force was steering towards Milos under heavy air attack when a single troop-laden caïque was sighted and was sunk by *Perth*. Later in the morning more small vessels were sighted ahead. The British destroyers gave chase while *Perth* and *Naiad* engaged an escorting enemy destroyer which retired under smoke. *Kingston*, ahead of the cruisers, engaged an enemy destroyer and reported sighting a large number of caïques behind a smoke-screen she was laying. This was apparently the Heraklion convoy, which was of considerable size. All this time the British force was under heavy air attack, which was practically continuous from 9.45 a.m. *Carlisle's* maximum speed was 21 knots and, in the chase, the ships were becoming strung out. King considered that in the face of heavy air attacks (Cunningham later described them as "certainly on a majestic scale") this was most undesirable, and he ordered the destroyers to abandon the chase, and withdrew to the westward. The Heraklion flotilla thus escaped. But the main object of the British—the prevention of seaborne landings on Crete—was achieved, as the Admiral Southeast ordered the return of the flotilla to Piraeus. "The problem of supplying heavy arms and reinforcement by sea," commented the Report of the *Fourth Air Fleet*, "therefore remained unsolved."² During retirement the air attacks continued unabated. *Perth* was shaken by near-misses, but *Naiad* and *Carlisle* were both hit, the first-named sustaining bad damage with her speed reduced to 16 knots.

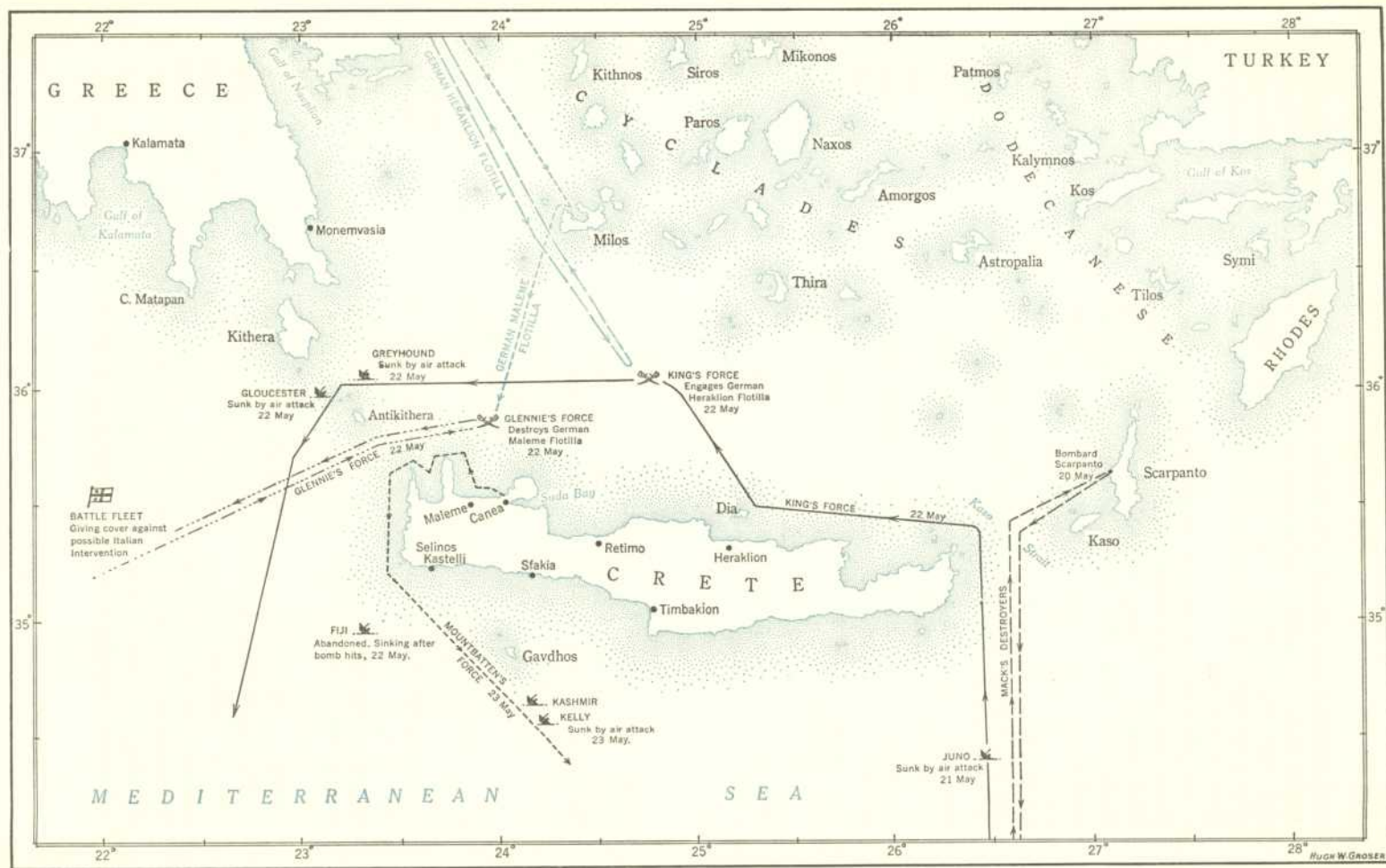
Rawlings with the battle squadron was patrolling close west of Kithera Channel. At 8.30 a.m. he was joined by *Gloucester*, *Fiji*, *Greyhound* and *Griffin*, which had spent the night patrolling off Matapan. Ordered by Cunningham, more destroyers were on their way to join him—Mountbatten's five ships from Malta, and Waller in *Stuart* with *Voyager* and *Vendetta* from Alexandria. Glennie's force, which Cunningham had ordered back to Alexandria when he heard of its shortage of ammunition, was detached for that port at 10.45 a.m. Shortly after noon Rawlings received a request for support from King, and the battle squadron headed for the Aegean at 23 knots. At 1.12 p.m., in the Kithera Channel, anti-aircraft shell bursts ahead indicated King approaching under heavy air attack. As the two forces met *Warspite* was attacked by dive bombers and received a direct hit which wrecked her starboard anti-aircraft batteries

Flotilla was caught and destroyed." The morning report of the *Twelfth Army* dated 28 May 1941 stated: "The number saved from *1 Light Convoy* has increased to 1,665 including 21 Italians. It is expected that this number will be still increased slightly, as not all the islands have been searched yet."

The Air Sea Rescue Service, which the Germans had instituted, saved many lives, helped by Italian speed boats and by the Italian destroyers *Lupo* and *Lira*, "whose conduct was exemplary". (*Air Fleet 4 Report*.)

The most reliable casualty statement seems to be the *Twelfth Army* statement of "Missing: 13 officers 311 OR lost at sea". This is supported by the QMG Report of 4 Jun which gives casualties of *1 Light Convoy* as "309 killed".

² Cunningham, in his Despatch on the battle, says that King's situation was a difficult one, "but it appears that no diminution of risk could have been achieved by retirement and that, in fact, the safest place for the squadron would have been among the enemy ships".



The Battle of Crete

HUGH W. GROSSER

and reduced her speed. The battle squadron turned in astern of King (who now, as senior officer, assumed command of the combined force). All ships were getting short of anti-aircraft ammunition, *Gloucester* and *Fiji* particularly so, and air attacks continued with little intermission, to take heavy toll.

Greyhound was the first to go. She was rejoining the screen around 2 p.m. after sinking a large caique when she was struck by two bombs from dive bombers. King, unaware of their shortage of ammunition, sent *Gloucester* and *Fiji*, with *Kingston* and *Kandahar*, to pick up survivors and stand by the stricken ship; but being told of their lack by Rawlings he at 2.57 p.m. ordered both cruisers and the destroyers to withdraw at *Gloucester's* discretion. At 3.30 p.m. the two cruisers were sighted from the battle squadron overtaking at high speed and engaging enemy aircraft. Twenty minutes later *Gloucester* was hit by several bombs, immobilised, and set on fire with her upper deck a shambles. *Fiji* was ordered to leave boats and rafts, sink *Gloucester*, and withdraw. The battle squadron, steering S.W. by S., was gradually getting clear of the Straits, but intermittent air attacks continued, and at 4.45 *Valiant* was hit aft in a high-level attack, though without serious damage. Soon after this *Fiji* reported her position, in company with *Kandahar* and *Kingston*, thirty miles due east from the main force, steering south and under air attack. At 5.45 p.m. Mountbatten's destroyers joined the battle squadron and at 6.30 p.m. course was altered to the southward to close *Fiji*. Before touch could be made *Kandahar* reported that *Fiji* had been hit and was sinking. *Kelly*, *Kipling* and *Kashmir* were detached to give assistance (*Kelvin* and *Jackal* were sent to Kithera Channel to seek *Gloucester* survivors), and Waller in *Stuart*, on his way to join Rawlings the following morning, was diverted with *Voyager* and *Vendetta* to help with the *Fiji* rescue work. The Australian destroyers could not find the position, however, and searched fruitlessly for some hours south of Gavdhos Island before being recalled to the battle squadron. In the event *Fiji's* survivors were rescued by *Kingston* and *Kandahar*, who left the scene of sinking with a total of 523 at 10.45 p.m. to join King. Two hours earlier, in accordance with instructions received from Cunningham, *Decoy* and *Hero* were detached from the battle squadron to Ayia Roumeli on the south coast of Crete to embark the King of Greece, the British Ambassador, and other important personages. Shortly before 10 p.m. Rawlings, whom King had requested to detail destroyers for night duties as instructed by Cunningham, ordered Mountbatten's destroyers to abandon their searches and to carry out night sweeps north of Crete in the Canea-Kisamos-Suda Bay area.

The main force had altered course to E.S.E. at 9 p.m. on the 22nd and so continued until 1 a.m. on the 23rd, when King with his four cruisers (two of them damaged and all practically denuded of anti-aircraft ammunition) parted company for Alexandria on Cunningham's orders. Rawlings remained south of Crete, and at 4 a.m. turned to the north-westward to make a daylight rallying point for Mountbatten off Kithera

Strait. But half an hour later a signal was received from Cunningham recalling all forces to Alexandria forthwith.³

On receipt of this signal Rawlings turned to the eastward ("although my inclination was to continue towards Cape Elephonisi") and took stock of the situation. There were in his vicinity scattered groups of ships south or south-west of Crete—King's four cruisers; Waller and his three destroyers; *Kandahar* and *Kingston* (almost out of fuel) on their way to join King; *Jaguar* and *Defender* bound from Alexandria to Suda Bay with ammunition for the army; *Kelvin* and *Jackal* of Mountbatten's flotilla who were returning independently after a sweep of Kisamos and Canea Bays; and *Decoy* and *Hero* with the King of Greece and other important personages on board. All these ships were within dive bomber range from the north, and Rawlings decided ("swayed, I believe, no little by the two fuel-less destroyers and *Decoy's* principal passenger") that he should form a rallying point for them. He therefore set course for Alexandria at 15 knots, and informed them all of his position, course and speed. Throughout the forenoon of the 23rd the scattered groups joined up (*Jaguar* and *Defender* were detached later to enter the Aegean at nightfall) and by 10.45 a.m. were in a compact force steering for Alexandria. The force was kept under enemy air observation during the day, but there were no attacks. Alexandria was reached without further incident in the early hours of the 24th May.

During the night of the 22nd-23rd, while the main force was south of Crete, British ships were active north of the island. In the east Mack (D) 14 in *Jervis*, with *Ilex*, *Nizam* and *Havock*, passed the Kaso Strait at 9 p.m. on the 22nd and patrolled off Heraklion without incident, and then withdrew to Alexandria. In the west *Kelvin* and *Jackal* reconnoitred Kisamos and Canea Bays and then withdrew. The rest of Mountbatten's force, *Kelly*, *Kashmir* and *Kipling*, did not leave Canea Bay (where *Kelly* and *Kashmir* carried out a short bombardment of Maleme, now in enemy hands, and damaged two troop-carrying caiques by gun fire) until nearly daylight, when they retired at full speed. They survived two air attacks but at 7.55 a.m. on the 23rd, just south of Gavdhos Island, they were attacked by twenty-four dive bombers. *Kashmir* and *Kelly* were sunk. *Kipling* rescued 279 officers and men (including Mountbatten). In the three hours of rescue operations she survived six bombing attacks in which it was estimated forty aircraft engaged and dropped eighty-three bombs. She reached Alexandria safely on the morning of the 24th after running out of fuel fifty miles from the port.

By this time things were going badly ashore in Crete, where the enemy was getting steady airborne reinforcements in the Maleme-Canea sector, and the British had to form a new line. At Heraklion a demand to surren-

³ Cunningham was influenced in his decision to recall all ships by his belief, caused by a calligraphic error in a signal he received from Rawlings, that the battleships had no pom-pom ammunition left. In fact they had plenty. But for this the battleships would not have been ordered back to Alexandria and would have been available as support for Mountbatten's destroyers on the morning of the 23rd as Rawlings intended, and the subsequent loss of *Kelly* and *Kashmir* might have been avoided.

der was rejected by the British and Greek commanders. An effort to reinforce the army was made on the 22nd, when *Glenroy* embarked 900 troops and sailed from Alexandria for Timbakion, escorted by *Coventry*, *Auckland* and *Flamingo*. The operation was postponed by Cunningham (after consultation with Wavell) in view of the heavy scale of enemy air attack off Crete, and the ships returned to Alexandria⁴ where they arrived during the night of the 23rd-24th. Another attempt to land troops was made on the 24th when *Isis*, *Hero* and *Nizam* left Alexandria carrying the headquarters and two battalions of "Special Service Troops" (commandos) for Selino Kastelli on the west of Crete. The weather was too bad to complete the operation, and these ships also returned to Alexandria with their troops. *Nizam*, who had embarked five officers and 103 troops, lost two 27-foot whalers in the heavy seas.

That night, however, the fast minelayer *Abdiel*⁵ reached Suda Bay and disembarked 200 Special Service troops, medical stores and ammunition. Captain Morse recorded of Suda Bay at this time that anti-aircraft defences were considerably reduced owing to damage and casualties from bombing; that General Freyberg and staff had joined him at naval headquarters owing to the bombing of military headquarters; and that he had destroyed unnecessary books and papers. Also during the night 24th-25th, in view of indications of a possible attempted landing at Sitia in the east by Italian forces from the Dodecanese, *Ajax*, *Dido*, *Kimberley* and *Hotspru* swept Kaso Strait, but sighted nothing.

During the 25th, 26th and 27th, considerable British forces were at sea, to harass the enemy and endeavour to reinforce Crete. By the 25th *Formidable's* fighter strength had been built up to twelve aircraft, and it was decided to use her in an air attack on Scarpanto, which was being used extensively by enemy air forces. At noon that day the 1st Battle Squadron, Pridham-Wippell in *Queen Elizabeth* with *Barham*, *Formidable*, and eight destroyers including the Australians *Voyager* and *Vendetta*, left Alexandria for a flying-off position S.S.W. of Kaso Strait. In the evening *Glenroy*, now under the escort of Waller in *Stuart* with *Coventry* and *Jaguar*, again sailed from Alexandria to try to land her troops at Timbakion. Another Australian destroyer, *Napier*, with *Kelvin* and *Jackal*, also left the Egyptian base to relieve the destroyers with *Ajax* and *Dido* and join the cruisers in a repetition of the sweep of the 24th-25th. In the early hours of the 26th *Abdiel*, *Hero* and *Nizam* sailed with the Special Service Troops it had not been possible to land at Selino Kastelli on the 24th. This time the attempt was to be made at Suda Bay.

The air attack on Scarpanto, limited in scale by the carrier's shortage of aircraft, was carried out in the morning darkness of the 26th. Two enemy aircraft on the ground were certainly destroyed and a number

⁴ The Admiralty took a direct hand in this. Cunningham ordered the convoy's return at 11.27 a.m. on the 23rd. At 3.59 p.m. the Admiralty ordered *Glenroy* to turn northwards "pending instructions", and an hour later urged Cunningham to land the reinforcements in Crete that night if possible. It was, however, too late for the ships to reach Timbakion that night, and disembarkation of troops by day was out of the question.

⁵ HMS *Abdiel*, minelayer (1941), 2,650 tons, six 4-in guns, 39.75 kts; sunk in Taranto Bay, 9 Sep 1943.

damaged, and two were shot down in combat during air attacks on the British ships. *Formidable* lost one aircraft. At 7 a.m. on the 26th the battle squadron was joined by *Ajax*, *Dido*, and their three destroyers, and the force retired to the south and east. Meanwhile the *Glenroy* convoy was some distance west of the battle squadron north bound, and Cunningham instructed Pridham-Wippell to provide cover. Course was altered to the westward soon after noon. At 1.20 p.m., when the battle squadron was about ninety miles north-east of Bardia it was attacked by large formations of fighter-escorted high level and dive bombers from Libya. *Formidable* received two hits, one of which blew in her starboard side forward and started a fire; and the destroyer *Nubian* had her stern blown off but remained seaworthy. *Formidable* operated fighter patrols until dusk, but was then detached for Alexandria escorted by *Voyager*, *Vendetta*, *Hereward* and *Decoy*. The remainder of the force operated to the north-west of Alexandria, and at daylight on the 27th steered towards Kaso. Just before 9 a.m., when 190 miles from Scarpanto, the squadron was attacked by about fifteen aircraft from the Dodecanese. *Barham* was hit, had a turret put out of action, and suffered flooded bilges from near misses.⁶ Soon after noon Cunningham recalled the squadron to Alexandria, where it arrived at 7 p.m.

Glenroy again failed to land her troops. Throughout the 26th the convoy was the target for sustained air attacks. Bombs were successfully evaded until the evening, when the ships were about fifty miles from their objective. At 6.20 p.m., in a heavy dive bombing attack, *Glenroy* was set on fire and damaged by near misses. The fire was extinguished and course resumed for Timbaktion, but three of *Glenroy's* landing craft were put out of action and all the army petrol was lost through the fire. It was plain that the landing could not be effected before daylight, and the operation was abandoned. At 9.15 p.m. the ships turned back, and reached Alexandria the following evening.

Abdiel, *Nizam* and *Hero* were more successful. They reached Suda Bay during the night 26th-27th, disembarked their troops and stores, and embarked 930 (merchant seamen, some naval people, and others not needed) and returned to Alexandria. It was the final reinforcement of Crete. On the 26th Morse recorded: "General situation in Suda-Canea area very bad and General Officer Commanding decided that he could no longer continue the battle. Preparations made for evacuation and movements of H.Q. and W/T to Sfakia. Confusion all day due to lack of definite orders. P.M. Burnt all unwanted secret papers." At 10 p.m. the following day, having destroyed the port wireless station, the remaining members of the base staff in a "convoy of lorries and cars left G.H.Q. for Sfakia. Progress very slow on account of bad road and thousands of disorganised retreating troops."

⁶ The Mediterranean Fleet was thus again deprived of an aircraft carrier. *Formidable* spent eight weeks being temporarily repaired in Alexandria, followed by about three months' repairs in the United States. *Barham* underwent temporary repairs in Alexandria, and was then for six weeks repairing in Durban.

IV

So far the navy had succeeded in its task of preventing seaborne invasion of Crete, but at heavy cost. In the six days of the battle two cruisers and four destroyers were sunk; the only aircraft carrier, two battleships, and one destroyer were virtually out of action and had to be withdrawn from the Mediterranean for repairs; and four cruisers and three destroyers incurred damage necessitating repair periods varying from a few days to a few weeks. Nor was the increasing strain confined to the material of the fleet, as Cunningham pointed out to the Admiralty. In reply to a Chiefs of Staff signal of the 23rd May (before all the losses listed above were incurred) in which he was told that "if enemy convoys were reported north of Crete the fleet would have to operate in that area by day although considerable losses might be expected", he said in a message to the Admiralty of the 26th that

the determining factor in operating in the Aegean is not fear of sustaining losses, but need to avoid loss which, without commensurate advantage to ourselves, will cripple fleet out here. . . .

Detailing the losses suffered up to then, he continued:

In point of fact, supply by sea has not yet come much into the picture, as despite loss and turning back of his convoys, enemy is so prolific in air that for the moment he is able to reinforce and keep his forces supplied by air at will. This process is quite unchecked by air action on our part, and sight of constant unhindered procession of JU-52's flying into Crete is among factors likely to affect morale of our forces. I feel that their Lordships should know that effect of recent operations on personnel is cumulative. Our light craft, officers, men, and machinery alike are nearing exhaustion. Since "Lustre" started at end of February they have been kept running almost to limit of endurance, and now, when work is redoubled, they are faced with an air concentration besides which, I am assured, that in Norway was child's play. It is inadvisable to drive men beyond a certain point.

The strain on men and material weighed heavily.⁷ But Cunningham put his finger on the determining factor in the battle for Crete—that the enemy was "able to reinforce and keep his forces supplied by air at will". His ability in this regard had not been appreciated. It had been believed that the ground forces in Crete could deal with such enemies as landed by air, and that "seaborne support was inevitable and that the destruction of troop convoys would win the day". As it was, because he was so prolific, and unopposed, in the air, the enemy was able to dispense with

⁷ Waller, on his return to Australia from the Mediterranean later in 1941, spoke of the lack of sleep as the greatest trial. An Australian officer in HMS *Naiad* similarly spoke of "the certain knowledge when one turned in that he would not wake naturally but to the sound of action station alarms or of bomb explosions". The 1st Lieutenant of *Hotspur*, writing of a day in Suda Bay during the Greek campaign, says: "It was about two in the afternoon when we finally got anchored and managed to eat a bit and get clean. The crew were so tired by now that I only closed up the short-range weapons, and let everyone else sleep. Of course at 3.30 the raid came. I was in such a deep sleep by now that it must have taken quite a few bombs to wake me, and I remember fighting to get my shoes on with the whistle and roar of bombs going on above me; and, still with a mind half conscious, I got up on deck to see a whopper go up about a hundred yards astern. . . . The most amazing thing of all was the fact that some of our sailors slept clean through the whole fiendish din of ack-ack barrage and shaking of near bombs without turning an eyelid, which all shows how tired they were." Hugh Hodgkinson, *Before the Tide Turned*, p. 99.

The strain was heavy on older ships, and summarising his material assets in a signal to the Admiralty on 31 May, Cunningham did not count "four [Australian] destroyers of 19th Division now only fit for local duty in Western Desert".

the seaborne support which was denied to him by the British navy, though undoubtedly that denial narrowed the margin by which he achieved victory, and raised that victory's cost so high that it inflicted a lasting defeat on the German propagandists of airborne assault. In the words of General Student, "father" of the airborne idea and its champion throughout the war, and who was responsible for the organisation of parachute and landing operations in Crete: "Crete was the grave of the German parachutists."⁸ No further operations were planned for parachute troops, and in October 1941 they were incorporated in the infantry forces on all fronts.⁹

The Battle of Crete proved to the British that in an aircraft versus ship battle in confined waters where the ships had no air cover and were exposed to powerful attacks pressed home with determination, overwhelming advantage lay with the air. On the other hand it proved to the Germans that a successful attack on a strongly defended island required not only air superiority but naval superiority also. This the Germans never achieved in the Mediterranean, even with the Italian Fleet. Their complete dominance in the air enabled them to win the battle ashore on Crete, but could not wholly debar British ships from operating in the surrounding waters. Nor could it prevent the withdrawal from the island by those ships of most of the defenders whose defeat it had made possible.

V

At 11 a.m. on the 26th May General Freyberg told General Wavell by signal that in his opinion "limit of endurance has been reached by troops under my command here at Suda Bay"; and that once that sector had been reduced the reduction of Retimo and Heraklion would be only a matter of time. Embarkation of a proportion of the force might be possible if an immediate decision were taken. The following morning Wavell informed the Chiefs of Staff in London that he feared "we must recognise that Crete is no longer tenable and that troops must be withdrawn as far as possible". That same day the Chiefs of Staff replied in agreement, and instructed that withdrawal should be effected forthwith. As Cunningham wrote:

At 3 p.m. on May 27th the fateful decision was taken, and we wearily turned to planning another evacuation with fewer ships, far less resources, and in circumstances much more difficult. Our seamen and our ships were worn to the point of exhaustion, and now they were asked for more.

As with the Greek withdrawal, that from Crete was one of hurried improvisation in which most of the troops embarked from beaches after they had undergone arduous cross-country marches, being bombed and fighting rearguard actions. In only one embarkation, that from Heraklion,

⁸ Post-war interrogation of General Student, Sep 1945.

⁹ Written in Jul 1945 by Generalmajor Seibt, who was QMG *XI Flying Corps* during the attack on Crete. Both references from "The Strategic Importance of Crete, 1940-41", study prepared by Enemy Documents Section, British Historical Branch. (Actually there were some subsequent parachute operations, among others one of battalion strength to rescue Mussolini, and one of smaller strength in the Ardennes fighting in Dec 1944.)

were any port facilities available. Owing to disorganisation ashore in Crete, and the paucity of communications, it was most difficult for Cunningham in Alexandria to keep a clear picture of what was happening and what ships were required from night to night at the embarkation points. Furthermore, having gained airfields in Crete, the enemy was able greatly to increase the scale of his air attacks and to extend them over the sea farther south. This general southward extension (for the bulk of the troops were lifted from Sfakia beach in the south of Crete) did, however, enable the Royal Air Force to provide limited fighter cover to ships during daylight with aircraft operating from Egypt. This protection was organised by Group Captain Pelly,¹ of R.A.F. Headquarters, Middle East, who was temporarily attached to Cunningham's staff. On the military side Cunningham received great assistance in arranging embarkations from Major-General Evetts,² of General Headquarters, Middle East, who was appointed on his staff as Military Liaison Officer.

The plan for embarkations was that troops from the Maleme-Suda Bay area and Retimo should proceed overland to the south coast and embark from the beach at Sfakia and Plakias respectively, and that those in the Heraklion area (excepting a small number isolated to the south, who were expected to make their way to Timbaktion) would be taken from that port. Embarkation would be at night, allowing the ships to sail by 3 a.m. to get as far as possible from enemy air bases by daylight. Embarkation points and numbers to be taken off would be signalled by Freyberg, and, after consulting Evetts, Cunningham would decide what ships to send. In general this plan was followed, but in the event Heraklion and Sfakia were the only embarkation points used.

It will be recalled that the overland withdrawal from the Suda Bay area started on the night of the 27th. The same day Heraklion was cut off by the enemy to the south and west. It was decided to carry out the first embarkations on the night 28th-29th from both Sfakia and Heraklion, with the main operation at Heraklion, where were some 4,500 troops, including the 2/4th Australian Battalion. The embarkation forces left Alexandria in the early morning of 28th May, Rawlings in *Orion* with *Ajax*, *Dido*, *Decoy*, *Jackal*, *Imperial*, *Hotspur*, *Kimberley* and *Hereward* for Heraklion; and Arliss, (D)7, in *Napier*, with *Nizam*, *Kelvin* and *Kandahar* for Sfakia.

Rawlings was due at Heraklion at midnight, and therefore had to pass through Kaso Strait by 9 p.m., at about the end of evening twilight. As the force sped northwards across the Mediterranean aircraft were detected, and attacks with high level bombing began at 5 p.m., followed a few minutes later by dive bombing. During the remaining four hours of daylight the ships were continuously attacked, some ten separate raids by

¹ Air Marshal Sir Claude Pelly, KCB, CBE, MC; RAF. C-in-C ME Air Force 1953. Of Orford, Suffolk, Eng; b. 19 Aug 1902.

² Lt-Gen Sir John Evetts, CB, CBE, MC. GOC 6 British Div 1941; Asst CIGS(W) 1942-44; Head of British Min of Supply Mission to Australia, and Ch Exec Officer, Joint UK-Aust Long Range Weapons Bd of Admin 1946-51. Regular soldier; b. Naini Tal, India, 30 Jun 1891.

formations of up to nine aircraft being recorded.³ At about 7.20 p.m. *Imperial* received a near miss, the results of which, not apparent at the time, were to be far-reaching. At 8.10 p.m. *Ajax* suffered a near miss which started a small fire, seriously wounded twenty men and badly shocked others, and caused above-water damage. Rawlings detached the ship and sent her back to Alexandria after dark. The remainder of the force cleared Kaso Strait at 9 p.m. and turned to the westward through a dark clear night with a fresh north-westerly wind.

At Heraklion the Naval Officer-in-Charge (Captain Macdonald) had been informed by Cunningham that the ships would arrive, and embarkation plans had been implemented. During the day the enemy received large airborne reinforcements, and for two hours during the afternoon the defenders underwent an intensive bombing and machine-gun attack by about 200 aircraft. The British defence line encircling the port was about seven miles in length, but by about 11 p.m. some 2,000 troops, including a large number of wounded, were on the mole ready to embark, and outlying troops were being withdrawn to an inner rearguard line.

Rawlings arrived soon after 11.30 p.m. It had been intended that the cruisers should enter harbour, but in view of the earlier fresh breeze he had decided to ferry with the destroyers, and stuck to this though it was now calm. Silently in the darkness, which was patterned only by occasional Very lights soaring up from the German lines beyond the town, *Hotspur*, *Decoy*, *Jackal* and *Hereward* stole into the harbour and berthed two-deep at the mole. Embarkation went smoothly, and after half an hour the two outside ships had filled and left to transfer their troops to the cruisers, shortly followed by the other two. *Imperial* and *Kimberley* then entered the harbour and loaded up, and *Kimberley*, last to leave, embarked the final stragglers at 2.55 and left the mole at exactly 3 a.m. on the 29th. "It is believed," wrote Macdonald, "that except for those in hospital none were left behind." The enemy made no attempt to interfere with the embarkation, and though on every night previous aircraft had flown over the harbour dropping parachute flares at 11 p.m. and sometimes at 2 a.m., none appeared on this night.

By 3.20 a.m. the force had formed up and was steaming at 29 knots for Kaso Strait. Shortly after, trouble started. At 3.45 a.m. *Imperial's* steering gear, apparently damaged by the near miss the previous day, suddenly failed. Rawlings sent *Hotspur* back to take everyone off and sink her, while the remainder of the force proceeded eastwards at 15 knots. *Hotspur*, her task completed and now with a total of about 900 on board, rejoined the squadron at the northern entrance to Kaso Strait just after sunrise, and speed was increased to 29 knots. As the sun rose the turn to the southward to the strait was made. It was then that fire was opened on the first two dive bombers. "Thereafter," wrote Rawlings, "attacks began in earnest."

³ Rawlings recorded that "since bombs were on occasion (up to 7 p.m.) seen to fall 5 to 10 miles away it was judged that friendly fighters were about". "Letter of Proceedings", 28-29 May 1941.

The squadron was in the middle of the strait when, at 6.25 a.m., *Hereward*, with approximately 450 troops on board, was hit. Rawlings decided it would be inviting further casualties to send a destroyer to her, and continued on. When last seen she was making slowly across the five miles of sea towards Crete, her guns engaging an enemy aircraft.⁴ *Decoy* was damaged by a near miss at 6.45, and speed had to be reduced to 25 knots, and further reduced for a while to 21 knots when a very close miss damaged *Orion* a few minutes later. About 8.15 *Dido* was hit, and at 9.5 a.m. *Orion*, both ships having forward turrets put out of action. It was shortly after this, when *Orion* was near-missed in an attack, that her captain, G. R. B. Back,⁵ died. He had been severely wounded by an explosive bullet in an earlier attack, and the bomb explosions "must have brought him back to a more conscious condition as he tried to sit up, calling on every one to 'keep steady'. When the attack ceased he called out 'It's all right men—that one's over'. Then he died."⁶

At 10.45, when the force was about 100 miles from Kaso, a squadron of eleven bombers attacked *Orion*, which had 1,100 troops on board. One bomb passed through the bridge and burst below in the crowded mess decks, and some 260 were killed and 280 wounded. Normal communication between bridge and engine room was destroyed, the steering gear was put out of action, and three boiler rooms were damaged. "The ship, out of control, steadied somewhat inconsiderately on a course for Scarpanto until matters could be rectified."⁷ *Hotspur's* 1st Lieutenant watched her as pouring yellow and black smoke, she was swinging round towards the Kaso Strait, out of control. . . . The whole squadron waited breathlessly, and then she began altering slowly round, and limped back towards us. We dropped back and round the wounded ship, and steamed on with her. Sometimes great clouds of yellow smoke would come from her funnel, and she would drop right down in speed owing to the sea-water seeping into her oil tanks.⁸

It was the last dive bomber attack, and after 11 a.m. there was a two-hour respite during which two Fulmar aircraft—the first friendly fighters seen by the force—"caused a distinct feeling of relief". There were three high level attacks between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m., but no further damage was suffered; and the force reached Alexandria at 8 p.m. and landed 3,486 troops, some 600 having been killed or captured on passage. "From my own observation," wrote Rawlings, "the conduct of the military units embarked in my flagship was admirable, and they remained remarkably steady and helpful throughout. I very much regret the heavy casualties they sustained."

Arliss' destroyer force had better fortune. The ships embarked additional whalers for beach work, five tons of badly needed rations for 15,000

⁴ She did not reach the shore, but sank. However most of her troops and ship's company were saved by Italian torpedo boats.

⁵ Capt G. R. B. Back, RN. (HMS's *Glory* 1914-16, *Ramillies* 1917-18.) Comd HMS's *Duncan* and Capt (D) 21 Flotilla 1939-40, *Orion* 1940-41; Flag Capt and CSO to Vice-Adm (D) Mediterranean 1940-41, to 7 Cruiser Sqn 1941. B. 22 Feb 1894. Killed in action 29 May 1941.

⁶ Rawlings, Letter of Proceedings.

⁷ Rawlings, Letter of Proceedings.

⁸ Hodgkinson, *Before the Tide Turned*, pp. 146-7.

troops, and 150,000 rounds of small arms ammunition at Alexandria, and made an uneventful passage to Sfakia, where they arrived about midnight on the 28th. Sfakia, a small fishing village, had a shingle beach of which only a short stretch could be used for embarking in boats. The beach was walled in by a 500-foot high escarpment and access to it was by a precipitous goat track. Only those actually embarking could be on the beach and, in the lack of signal communications, touch between the beach area and troops on the escarpment, in hiding from air observation, had to be maintained on foot. It took at least two hours to climb the goat track. Both navy and army headquarters on shore were now in a cave near the village, and for this first night Morse had signalled Cunningham that "up to 1,000 will be ready to embark". Embarking in their boats, the destroyers lifted a total of 744⁹ and sailed at 3 a.m. on the 29th. On the return passage the force was bombed by four aircraft between 9.5 a.m. and 9.40 a.m. and *Nizam* sustained minor damage from near misses. Alexandria was reached without further incident at 5 p.m. that day.

On the evening of the 27th Morse signalled to Cunningham that numbers available for embarkation at Sfakia would be: night of 29th-30th, 6,000; 30th-31st, 5,000; 31st-1st June, 3,000; plus 1,200 from Retimo at Plakias Bay. To meet the 29th-30th commitment, Cunningham sailed a force from Alexandria at 9 p.m. on the 28th under King in *Phoebe*,¹ with *Perth*, *Calcutta*, *Coventry*, *Glengyle*, *Jervis*, *Janus* and *Hasty*. The relatively slow speed of *Glengyle* dictated the sailing time from Alexandria and lengthened the period of passage. Only one air attack was experienced on the passage north, at 10 a.m. on the 29th, when bombs fell close to *Perth*.

Meanwhile, in Alexandria, Cunningham learned of the losses and damage suffered by the Heraklion force. In a signal to the Admiralty on the 29th he outlined the situation, and added that a Glen ship and cruisers were on their way to Sfakia. He continued:

It is evident that tomorrow we must expect further casualties to ships accompanied with extremely [heavy] casualties to men particularly in the case of *Glengyle* if she is hit with 3,000 men on board. The fighter protection available is very meagre.

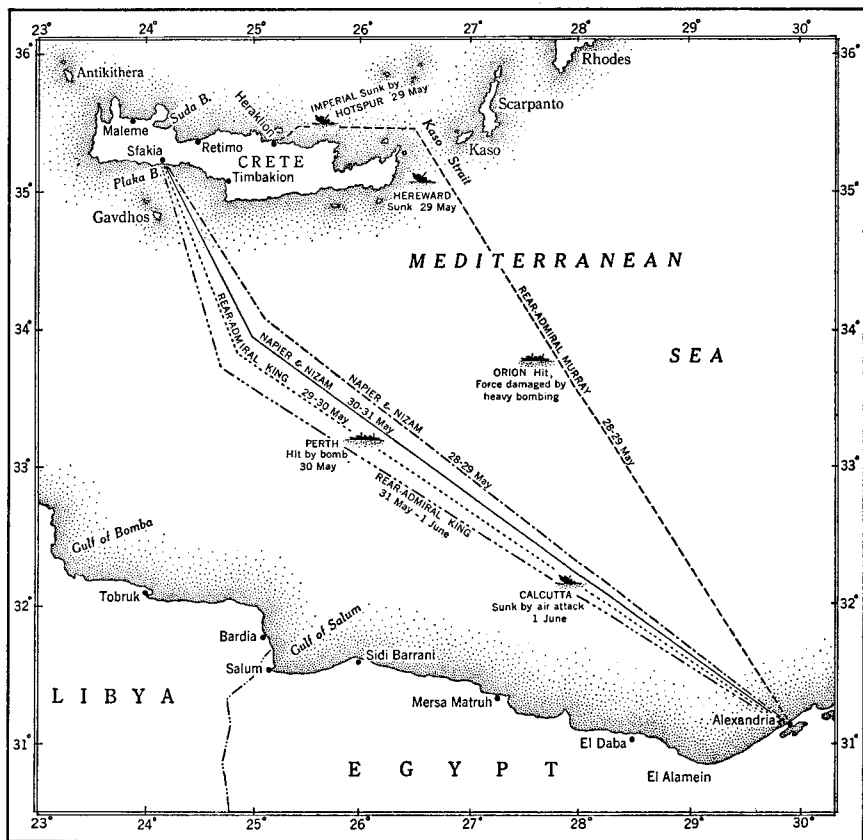
He then asked if it were justified risking heavy casualties in crowded ships, and accepting a scale of loss and damage to the fleet which "may make us so weak that we cannot operate". He remarked that on the other hand to leave men deliberately in enemy hands was against all our tradition "though in the end many men will be alive who may well be lost if they embark". He showed his own feelings by concluding:

I am ready to continue with the evacuation as long as we have a ship with which to do so but I feel it my duty to put these considerations before their Lordships.

⁹ Arliss' figures of actual embarkations: *Napier*, 296 troops; *Kandahar*, 213 troops; *Kelvin*, 101 troops; *Nizam*, 114 troops—a total of 724. The other 20 were miscellaneous. For example *Napier's* list was: 36 officers, 260 other ranks, 3 women, 1 Greek, 1 Chinaman, 10 merchant seamen, 2 children, 1 dog. (The dog is not included in the total.)

¹ HMS *Phoebe*, cruiser (1940), 5,450 tons, ten 5.25-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 33 kts.

The Admiralty, possibly influenced by Cunningham's remark about the many men who would remain alive as prisoners but might well be dead if they embarked, reversed the stand they had taken six days earlier on sending a "Glen" ship to Crete, and replied that same evening that *Glengyle* should be turned back but the remaining ships should continue. By the time this signal was received by Cunningham *Glengyle* was



Withdrawal from Crete

nearing Sfakia, so she was not recalled. (Admiralty, in a later signal, concurred in this.) Instead, to strengthen King's screen and to be available as rescue ships should any in his force be sunk, Cunningham sent Waller in *Stuart* with *Jaguar* and *Defender* from Alexandria late on the 29th to join King south of Crete the following morning.

King's force reached Sfakia at 11.30 p.m. on the 29th and embarkation began in *Glengyle's* boats and two landing craft which had been specially shipped in *Perth*. Embarkation proceeded swiftly after some temporary

slowness with walking wounded. Some delay was experienced on shore due to the inadequacy of the goat track and, once embarkation was in its swing, Morse found "the difficulty was to get troops down to the beach quickly enough". At 3.20 a.m. on the 30th, having embarked "about 3,400 troops",² the force sailed at 19½ knots. *Stuart*, *Jaguar* and *Defender* joined at 6.48 a.m. south of Gavdhos. Three air attacks were made on the force during the passage to Alexandria, and in the first of these, soon after 9.30 a.m., *Perth* sustained a direct hit abaft the bridge. The bomb exploded in "A" boiler room; put the forward unit out of action; and killed two cooks and two stokers³ of the ship's company and two Marines and seven soldiers among the passengers. Warrant Officer Hill and Stoker Petty Officer Reece remained in the boiler room among scalding steam in a gallant effort to save one of the stokers. He was dead when they brought him out, and themselves badly scalded.⁴ In the subsequent attacks between noon and 1 p.m. *Perth*, as a "wounded bird", was singled out for attention and suffered some near misses which "shook the ship's structure considerably". From then on the passage was uneventful. Late in the afternoon the force passed *Napier* and *Nizam* north-bound, and "the welcome light of Ras-el-Tin [the lighthouse at Alexandria] was sighted a few minutes before midnight".

In Alexandria, Cunningham had received conflicting pictures of the situation in Crete and of the numbers remaining to be embarked. In the afternoon of the 29th he was told in a message from General Wavell that Wavell, Air Marshal Tedder⁵ and General Blamey unanimously considered that "Glen" ships and cruisers should not be used, but that destroyers should embark at Sfakia on the night of the 30th. At 9.15 a.m. on that day Cunningham dispatched *Arliss* in *Napier* with *Nizam*, *Kelvin* and *Kandahar* from Alexandria. Soon after midday *Kandahar* developed engine trouble and *Arliss* sent her back to harbour. Three hours later three aircraft delivered an attack in which near misses damaged *Kelvin*; she was sent back, and the two Australian ships continued alone. They passed King's force thirty minutes later, and reached Sfakia without further incident in time to begin embarkation half an hour after midnight. Embarkation arrangements ashore were excellent, "the only pity being

² King's figure. According to figures supplied by the British Army authorities "from a count of those actually landed at Alexandria, these figures are only approximately correct", the lift on this occasion was 6,029. *Perth* embarked "1,188 passengers including military officers and other ranks, refugees, Allied troops, and Distressed British Seamen".

³ Ldg Cook/S W. B. Fraser, 21320, RAN, HMAS *Perth* 1939-41. Metal worker; of Lithgow, NSW; b. Lithgow, 27 Oct 1918. Killed in action 30 May 1941.

Cook/S N. T. Smith, 23735, RAN, HMAS *Perth* 1941. Station hand; of Orange, NSW; b. Orange, 9 Nov 1921. Killed in action 30 May 1941.

Stoker H. Straker, 22535, RAN, HMAS's *Canberra* 1939-40, *Perth* 1940-41; of Lake Macquarie, NSW; b. Lake Macquarie, 17 Nov 1916. Killed in action 30 May 1941.

Stoker 2nd Class H. C. Smith, W1621, RANR, HMAS *Perth* 1940-41. Of Spotswood, Vic; b. Fitzroy, Vic, 9 Jan 1921. Killed in action 30 May 1941.

⁴ Warrant Mechanician H. C. Hill, DSC, 18387, RAN, HMAS's *Hobart* 1938-41, *Perth* 1941-42. Of Gladsville, NSW; b. Devonport, Eng, 15 Apr 1907. Lost in sinking of *Perth*, 1 Mar 1942.

Stoker PO W. J. H. Reece, DSM, 17867, RAN, HMAS *Perth* 1939-42. Of Goulburn, NSW; b. Goulburn, 8 Jul 1903. Lost in sinking of *Perth*, 1 Mar 1942.

⁵ At the beginning of May Air Marshal Longmore was recalled to England and Tedder became acting Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East. (Marshal of RAF Lord Tedder, GCB. Dep AOC-in-C RAF ME 1940-41, AOC-in-C 1941-43; Dep Supreme Cdr SHAEF 1944-45; Ch of Air Staff 1946-50. Regular airman; b. Glenguin, Stirling, Scotland, 11 Jul 1890.)

that the army had been informed that destroyers could only carry 250 men each".⁶ Actually the two ships embarked a total of 1,403.⁷ By 2.30 a.m. on the 31st *Nizam* had filled and sailed. *Napier* followed half an hour later.

Earlier in the evening, under instructions from their respective Commanders-in-Chief, General Freyberg and staff, the Air Officer Commanding and staff, and Captain Morse and the naval staff left Sfakia in two Sunderland aircraft for Egypt. Major-General Weston,⁸ Royal Marines, remained in command on shore in Crete. On the 30th, before leaving Sfakia, Freyberg signalled Wavell asking for "one last lift tomorrow night, we could embark anything up to 7,000". After consultation, Cunningham decided to send all available ships, but that maximum number to be lifted would not exceed 2,000. To carry out this embarkation King in *Phoebe*, with *Abdiel*, *Kimberley*, *Hotspur* and *Jackal*, left Alexandria at 6 a.m. on the 31st.

At this time *Napier* and *Nizam* were on their way south, and at 6.25 a.m. had the heartening sight of friendly fighters. From 8.50 to 9.15 a.m., however, they were attacked by twelve dive bombers, and *Napier* sustained engine and boiler room damage from near misses which reduced her speed to 23 knots, and, at 2.10 p.m., caused her to stop for a few minutes to effect repairs. She subsequently went ahead on one engine and managed to reach 20 knots, and the two ships reached Alexandria without further incident at 7 p.m.

During the day Arliss intercepted signals which told him of the small number to be embarked by King's force that night. He thereupon sent an emergency signal to Cunningham, repeated to King and Wavell, giving an accurate picture of the situation at Sfakia where "there are roughly 6,500 men to come", and saying that he considered it essential to tell the army there that all these could be embarked [by King's force], "destroyers can carry up to 1,000 each. *Napier* and *Nizam* have 1,700 now." As a result of this signal, and of subsequent discussions between Mr Fraser, the Prime Minister of New Zealand (then in Egypt), Wavell, Freyberg, Evetts and Cunningham, King was instructed at 8.51 p.m. to "fill to maximum capacity".

Shortly before this Cunningham received a message from Blamey, who was perturbed at the small number of Australians so far withdrawn, asking if one of the ships could go to Plakias "where he believed a number of our troops had assembled". For example, of the five Australian infantry battalions on Crete (leaving improvised units out of account) two were withdrawing to Sfakia and one had been embarked from Heraklion, but two were cut off at Retimo. An aircraft had been sent to drop a message to the Retimo garrison ordering them to withdraw to Plakias, but the aircraft failed to return and it was not known if the message was delivered. In the circumstances it was not possible to accede to Blamey's request.

⁶ Arliss, Operation Report.

⁷ Arliss' figures: *Napier*, 68 officers, 637 other ranks; *Nizam*, 53 officers, 645 other ranks. The army figures (those actually landed at Alexandria) were given as 1,510.

⁸ Lt-Gen E. C. Weston, CB. Comd MNBDO 1940-43; Member of Ordnance Bd. Min of Supply 1943-45. RM Officer; b. 5 Jun 1888. Died 19 Feb 1950.

King's force underwent three bombing attacks on the passage north, but no bombs fell close and covering fighters kept many attackers distant. Sfakia was reached at 11.20 p.m. on the 31st, and the army was in readiness with three motor landing craft (left by *Glengyle*) already loaded. Embarkation proceeded so rapidly that for a time the beach was empty of troops. "The result was that they came so slowly that we could have taken off quite a few more before we had to leave."⁹ At 3 a.m. on the 1st June the force sailed, having landed some medical stores and embarked 3,900 troops.¹ No attacks were made on the force on the passage south, mainly due to effective fighter protection, and Alexandria was reached without incident at 5 p.m. on the 1st June. There was, however, one last blow by the enemy. To provide additional escort for King's ships, Cunningham sailed the anti-aircraft cruisers *Calcutta* and *Coventry* from Alexandria early on the 1st June. Just after 9 a.m. they were attacked by dive bombers, and two bombs hit and sank *Calcutta*. *Coventry* was able to rescue 23 officers and 232 men with whom she returned to Alexandria.

This was the final embarkation by naval surface craft. About 5,000 were left on shore round Sfakia and perhaps an equal number at Retimo and elsewhere. The men at Sfakia were "incapable of further resistance owing to strain and lack of food".² During the night of 31st May-1st June General Weston, instructed by Wavell, left Sfakia in a flying-boat for Egypt. Before he departed he left behind written orders to the senior officer remaining ashore (whoever he might then be) to come to terms with the enemy. This turned out to be Lieut-Colonel Walker,³ whose 2/7th Australian Battalion had been in the final rearguard position. It had begun a difficult march down to the beach at 9 p.m. but had arrived too late and, when the last landing craft departed, had just been drawn up on the beach awaiting embarkation.

About midnight on the 31st the First Sea Lord signalled to Cunningham that the British Government considered a further embarkation should be attempted on the night 1st-2nd June "if reasonable prospect that any substantial formed body of men is capable of embarking". Cunningham replied that Weston had instructed those remaining to capitulate, and that no further ships would be sent. As he pointed out to the Admiralty, the moon now allowed bombing of ships and beaches thus considerably increasing the hazards to ships and men; and in view of the developing situation in the Middle East "to allow the possibility of still further reduction of the estimated force available was out of the question. Even as it is we are in no condition to meet any serious enemy movement."

⁹ Hodginkson, p. 152.

¹ The Army figures (actually landed at Alexandria) were given as 3,710. According to the army figures a grand total of 16,511 were landed at Alexandria, including 112 previous to the first lift by *Abdiel*, *Hero* and *Nizam* at Suda Bay on the night 26th-27th May, and 54 sent out by air. The army list states: "These figures are only approximately correct. Those killed on passage are not included. Allowing for men killed on passage and for probable miscounting on disembarkation, it is believed that about 17,000 troops were evacuated from Crete."

² Report by Weston on arrival in Egypt.

³ Lt-Col T. G. Walker, DSO. CO 2/7 Bn 1939-41. Bank officer; of Hampton, Vic; b. Richmond, Vic, 14 Oct 1900.

Some small groups managed to reach North Africa from Crete by their own efforts. Five officers and 135 other ranks including Royal Marines, Australians, New Zealanders and Special Service troops, under Major Garrett⁴ of the Royal Marines, crossed in one of *Glengyle's* landing craft which they patched up, making most of the passage under improvised sail. They landed near Sidi Barrani (less two of their number who died from exhaustion) during the night of the 8th-9th June. During the 10th and 11th *Glengyle's* other two landing craft reached the Egyptian coast carrying in all over 100. Other parties reached safety, including 78 brought out by the submarine *Thrasher*⁵ in July. Many men remained fighting in Crete as guerillas, and later an organisation was set up whereby these were supplied and reinforced. As a result the "Germans had to maintain in Crete a force which was ridiculously out of keeping for simple garrison duty".⁶

The Crete campaign cost the navy heavily, and left the Mediterranean Fleet with only two battleships, three cruisers, and seventeen destroyers immediately serviceable. Three cruisers and six destroyers were sunk; two battleships, the only aircraft carrier, two cruisers and two destroyers were damaged beyond the repair capabilities of the Mediterranean; and three cruisers and six destroyers were under on-the-spot repairs taking from a fortnight to some weeks to effect. Over 2,000 officers and men were killed. Of this Cunningham wrote in his dispatch in the August following the campaign:

More than once I felt that the stage had been reached when no more could be asked of officers and men, physically and mentally exhausted by their efforts and by the events of these fateful weeks. It is perhaps even now not realised how nearly the breaking point was reached, but that these men struggled through is the measure of their achievement and I trust that it will not lightly be forgotten. . . . The Mediterranean Fleet paid a heavy price for the achievement. Losses and damage were sustained which would normally only occur during a major fleet action, in which the enemy fleet might be expected to suffer greater losses than our own. In this case the enemy fleet did not appear (though it had many favourable opportunities for doing so) and the battle was fought between ships and aircraft.

The losses did not prove that ships were impotent in the face of air attack. They were vulnerable without air cover, but their comparative immunity when, during the last few days, some air cover was provided, suggests that a few squadrons of long-range fighters would have altered the picture. The ships did what aircraft alone could not have done—prevented a seaborne invasion. Not until the battle had been decided and withdrawal had begun did enemy seaborne troops land, and it was the 2nd June before the Germans established communication "with a battle group of Italians, which, arriving from Rhodes, had landed at Sitia and, without fighting, had occupied the eastern part of the island".⁷

⁴ Lt-Col R. Garrett, DSO, OBE. CO 1 Hy AA Regt, RM 1942-45. RM Officer; b. Ceylon, 11 Nov 1903. Drowned in Scotland 1952.

⁵ HMS *Thrasher*, submarine (1940), 1,090 tons, one 4-in gun, ten 21-in torp tubes, 15.25 kts.

⁶ Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 392.

⁷ Battle Report of XI Air Corps.

CHAPTER 10

THE MIDDLE EAST

THE campaigns in Greece and Crete, and their outcome, made a considerable impression in Australia, the effects of which were felt widely elsewhere. Since Australian and New Zealand troops were engaged on a proportionately large scale, and casualty lists were long, it was natural that events in the Eastern Mediterranean during April and May 1941 should be viewed out of their perspective by a contemporary observer in Australia. This was sensed by the Australians fighting overseas who, fortified by their confidence in each other and by their measure of the enemy they fought, saw the situation more truly.¹

In Australia, newspaper criticism of the strategy and of the conduct of the war in the Eastern Mediterranean, coupled with political discussions whether the Advisory War Council should have been consulted on the participation of Australian troops in Greece, received wide publicity which was cabled overseas and (helped by enemy propaganda) gave rise abroad to misconceptions as to Australia's attitude towards the war. The Australian Ministers in the United States (Mr Casey) and Japan (Sir John Latham) both protested to the Government regarding the effect this was having in those countries.² On receipt of these protests, and as the result of a request from Mr Fadden³ (Acting Prime Minister in the absence

¹ After the evacuation of Greece, a rating in *Stuart* wrote to his parents: "... As you can guess by the news, we are being kept extremely busy; in fact on the go all the time. Just at present the news seems pretty black, and no doubt more so to you at home than it does to us on the spot. The withdrawal from Greece was rather depressing, but of course unavoidable. Our army put up a magnificent fight there, the Australians and New Zealanders playing a very big part. We've had a lot of our boys on board, and what a magnificent lot of chaps they are. They were still confident that, given equal terms, they would wipe the Huns from the face of the earth. ... Anyway we are still smiling and full of confidence and will, of course, beat them in the end. And although the people in Australia may be disappointed at the result of the campaign, they can, indeed, feel very proud of the way our boys fought."

Writing to his mother after Crete, an Australian soldier said: "... With regard to the evacuation itself, we marched by night and lay low by day, fifty odd miles through rocky valleys to the sea. The march was hot, and the trek from well to well difficult, because the snow fed streams are no longer running. Most of the men lost were lost from bombing and machine-gunning; and many were left on the beach. Once again the AIF is saying from the depths of its heart, thank God for the Navy, who have twice saved our lives and succoured us into safety. ... For the present, all we ask is a little security and a period of rest to draw ourselves together again up to our full strength and stature. There will be many grieving at home, more acutely than we are here. But in war, inevitably men must give their lives, and though life may appear to have been lost in vain, it is not so. ... The Navy, as in Greece, behaved quietly, efficiently, and perfectly. It is extraordinary, but I have been in two evacuations now, when the Hun is on your tail and any waiting is nerve-wracking, but when you take your foot off the land and place it in the landing craft, you feel totally safe—we're right now, the Navy's got us. ... If you ever have the chance to do anything for the Navy, do it; also the Maoris, who volunteered to fight the rearguard action to let the rest of us get away."

² "I would most strongly represent that so far as U.S. opinion is concerned the news being telegraphed here from Australia is most unfortunate. U.S. has little Australian background knowledge and extension in form that it reaches domestic America is encouraging speculation as to whether 'Australia is about to pull out of war'. I need hardly say any news capable of interpretation here that a British country might withdraw full participation in the war or even limit its effort will greatly strengthen and encourage isolationist sentiment here which now organising drive with Lindbergh as spearhead. German radio propaganda has seized on this and is capitalising on it." Casey to Government, 24 Apr 1941.

"[Japanese] press particularly vernacular gives great prominence this morning to reports of important political crisis in Australia on account of events in Greece using such headlines as 'British Empire crumbling to pieces', 'Australian Prime Minister severely critical of Britain's war policy'." Latham to Government, 25 Apr 1941.

³ Rt Hon Sir Arthur Fadden, KCMG. MHR since 1936. Min for Air 1940; Prime Minister Aug-Oct 1941; Treasurer 1940-41 and since 1949. Of Townsville and Brisbane; b. Ingham, Qld, 13 Apr 1895.

overseas of Mr Menzies), the Leader of the Opposition (Mr Curtin) immediately issued a statement denying any dissension, and stating that his political party was definitely behind the Government in Australia's war effort.

Mr Curtin was not, however, in agreement with the Government's adherence to British strategy in the Mediterranean. In the Advisory War Council on the 8th May he suggested that consideration should be given to "the vacation of the Mediterranean before the British Fleet was hemmed in there", and that from the point of view of Australia's defence the defence of India was of greater importance than the defence of Egypt. He returned to the subject in the Advisory War Council a month later when, on the 5th June, he questioned whether "it would not be better to scrap the African Empire, close the Suez Canal and endeavour to hold Palestine. The effect of air power on naval power had greatly modified the effectiveness of our fleet in the Mediterranean."

Mr Menzies (who had by this time returned to Australia) pointed out the consequences of such action. Axis control of north and north-west Africa would greatly add to Britain's difficulties in maintaining her Atlantic lines of communication, and "there would be nothing to prevent the Germans putting any forces they desired into Egypt and going on to the Persian Gulf, and ultimately to India". Mr Menzies might have added that the very name "Alexandria" should have reminded one of this possibility; it was from that city that its founder, in 33 B.C., started his march which led him through the Middle East to India.⁴

Britain's abandonment of the "African Empire" might well have been fatal to her. The Middle East, the world's richest source of oil and the continental gateway to India, was the vital area. Germany and Italy had friends there anxious to welcome them, but Turkey and Russia lay athwart the land bridge which was their only way in. On the other hand Britain, with control of the sea in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean (whose two great arms, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, extend deeply into the Middle East) had ready access there. Abandonment of the "African Empire" would have reversed the situation, opened the Middle East to Germany and Italy and closed it to Britain. Not only would the Africa-dominated Red Sea (and consequently Eastern Mediterranean) have become untenable to British ships, but the whole of the Indian Ocean communications would have been jeopardised, and the road cleared for an eventual link up there between the western Axis partners and the Japanese. The German naval staff saw the situation

⁴ In 1798, in circumstances not dissimilar from those of 1941, the defence of Egypt in relation to that of India was exercising British thought. On 13 Jun of that year Pitt's Secretary for War, Mr Henry Dundas, writing to Lord Grenville, the Foreign Secretary, suggested that Napoleon might march to Aleppo and copy Alexander "by following the River Euphrates and the Tigris, and descending to the Persian Gulph, and thence proceeding along the coast to the Indies." Arnold Wilson, *The Persian Gulf* (1928), p. 1.

On 29 Jun 1798, Nelson wrote to St Vincent explaining his reason for thinking that the French fleet had gone to Alexandria: ". . . for, strange as it may appear at first sight, an enterprising Enemy, if they have the force or consent of the Pacha of Egypt, may with great ease get an Army to the Red Sea, and if they have concerted a plan with Tippoo Sahib, to have vessels at Suez, three weeks, at this season, is a common passage to the Malabar Coast, when our India possessions would be in great danger." Clemence Dane, *The Nelson Touch* (1942), pp. 77-8.

clearly when it told Hitler that the development of the situation in the Mediterranean with its effect on the African and Middle East areas was of decisive importance for the outcome of the war, and urged him to "fight for the African area as the foremost strategic objective of German warfare as a whole".⁵

II

During the period of the Greek and Crete campaigns and the British reverse in Libya, and overshadowed by them, events in tropical Africa and in the Middle East had developed in Britain's favour; a fact largely due to her control of the Indian Ocean. In the exercise of that control Australian ships took part, the sloops *Parramatta* and *Yarra* by active participation in the East African and Middle East campaigns; and in the wide ocean reaches the cruisers *Australia* and *Canberra*, and the Australian-manned armed merchant cruiser *Kanimbla*. For the first three months of 1941 the two sloops were with the Red Sea Force. In the main the work, escorting convoys and patrolling, was monotonous and uninspiring. Harrington in *Yarra* complained that the month of December 1940 was extremely uneventful, having been spent almost entirely in escort duties and being entirely lacking in air raids or other events of interest which might serve to break the monotony.

Similarly Walker in *Parramatta* wrote in January 1941 that the morale of the ship's company remained high, but

disappointment is of course felt that the ship has not yet been able to participate in a surface action or active operation.

The evidence of the value of their work was, however, constantly with those in the Red Sea Force—the ships of the convoys they escorted, many crowded with Australian and New Zealand troops. Of a north-bound convoy which *Parramatta* joined off Aden on the 26th February, Walker wrote:

It was an inspiring sight when formed, consisting as it did of 21 of the largest troop ships escorted by a cruiser, two escort vessels and a destroyer; the second most expensive convoy to which we have been attached, with a total tonnage of over 320,000.

New Zealand troops in the *Athlone Castle* (25,564 tons), commodore of the convoy, hailed *Parramatta* with "Hello! Pommies"; and Walker remarked that his ship's company "indignantly repudiated the aspersion". It was at this time that Walker recorded "a sense in the Red Sea Force of impending climax". That climax was the defeat of the Italians in East Africa.

In January the British armies launched a pincer movement attack. In the north, General Platt⁷ drove eastward from the Sudan into Eritrea

⁵ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 14 Nov 1940.

⁷ General Sir William Platt, GBE, KCB, DSO. GOC Troops in Sudan 1938-41; GOC-in-C East Africa Cd 1941-45. B. 14 Jun 1885.

towards the Red Sea base at Massawa. In the south General Cunningham⁸ advanced from Kenya northwards into Abyssinia, and eastwards into Italian Somaliland with its seaports Kismayu and Mogadiscio. Here advance to the coast was rapid, and naval assistance was given by Force "T" under Captain Edelsten⁹ in *Shropshire*, with H.M. Ships *Hermes*, *Hawkins*,¹ *Capetown* and *Ceres*, and the destroyer *Kandahar*, which carried out bombardments of ports and of Italian transport on the coast road. Opening of the ports and supply from the sea was essential to General Cunningham, who would otherwise have found it necessary for his forces "to return to the Italian Somaliland border as I would have been unable to maintain them forward".² On the 14th February, after a point-blank bombardment of the forts by *Shropshire*, Kismayu was occupied, and Mogadiscio was taken eleven days later.

III

Meanwhile there was considerable activity, both British and enemy, in the adjacent ocean area. Middle East troop convoys from Britain, India, and Australia, traversed it from the south and east; and always somewhere in its spaces were smaller commercial convoys and independent unescorted ships. It was a focal area attracting surface raiders. In January the raider *Atlantis*, which had been refitting at Kerguelen Island far to the south, began operations off East Africa, working westward roughly on the latitude of Mombasa. East of the Seychelles she sank the British *Mandasor* on the 24th January, and westward of those islands captured the British *Speybank* (dispatched as a prison ship to Germany) on the 31st, and the Norwegian tanker *Ketty Brovig* (retained as an oiler for raiders) on the 2nd February.³

Early in February H.M.A.S. *Australia*, which had been employed on convoy escort work in the Atlantic, rounded the Cape escorting eleven ships to Durban. They left that port on the 15th February, joined another convoy from the Cape escorted by the cruiser *Emerald*,⁴ and steamed in seven columns north for Suez via Mozambique Channel as convoy WS.5B.⁵ On the 21st, when off Mombasa, *Emerald* was detached with four ships for Bombay, and *Hawkins* joined the escort in her stead. That evening a distress message was received from S.S. *Canadian Cruiser* (7,178 tons)

⁸ General Sir Alan Cunningham, GCMG, KCB, DSO, MC. GOC 66, 9 and 51 Divs 1940, East Africa Cd 1940-41, Eighth Army Nov 1941. High Commr and C-in-C Palestine 1945-48. B. 1 May 1887.

⁹ Admiral Sir John Edelsten, GCB, GCVO, CBE; RN. SNO in ops against Italian Somaliland 1940-41; C of S to C-in-C Mediterranean Stn 1941-42; RA (Destroyers) British Pacific Fleet 1945; Vice-Chief of Naval Staff 1947-49; C-in-C Mediterranean 1950-52. B. 12 May 1891. (It was he who sighted *Zara* and *Fiume* from *Warspite*'s bridge immediately prior to the night action at Matapan.)

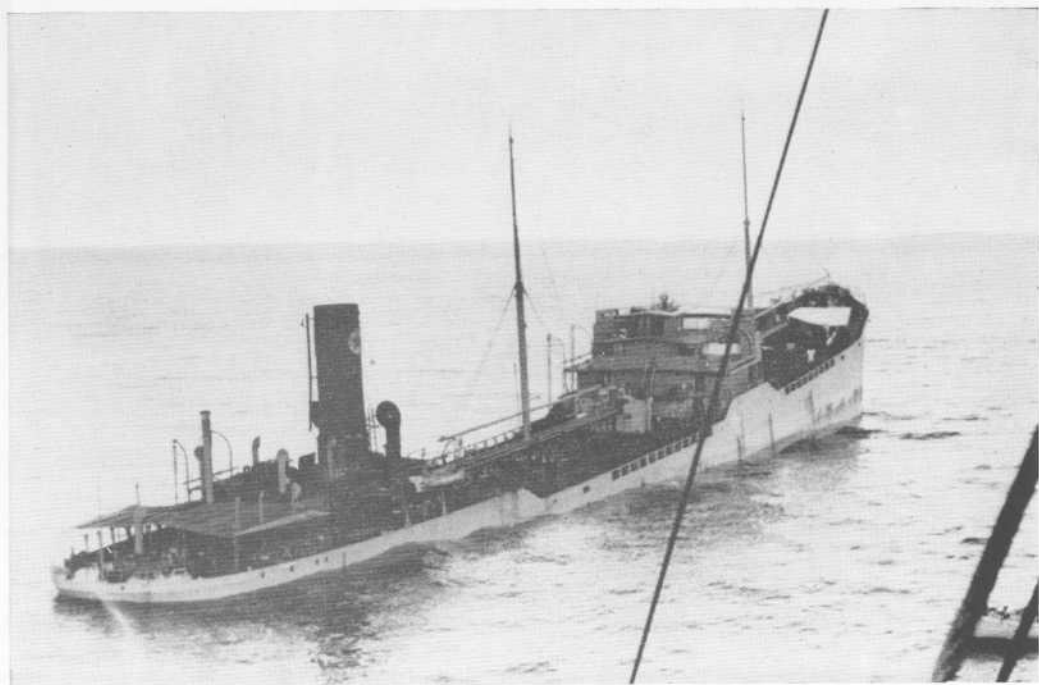
¹ HMS *Hawkins*, cruiser (1919), 9,800 tons, seven 7.5-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 29.5 kts.

² Lt-Gen A. G. Cunningham, Despatch, *Operations in East Africa, November 1940-July 1941*.

³ The *Mandasor* was of 5,144 tons, *Speybank* 5,154 and *Ketty Brovig* 7,031.

⁴ HMS *Emerald*, cruiser (1926), 7,550 tons, seven 6-in guns, sixteen 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts.

⁵ Of twenty ships, convoy WS.5B included one "*Monarch*" (of Bermuda), two "*Empresses*" (of Australia and Japan), two "*Duchesses*" (of Bedford and Richmond), and no less than six "*Castles*" (*Winchester*, *Capetown*, *Durban*, *Arundel*, *Windsor*, and *Athlone*). It was the convoy later, as stated above, escorted from Aden to Suez by *Parramatta*. These eleven vessels ranged in tonnage from 17,000 to 27,000.



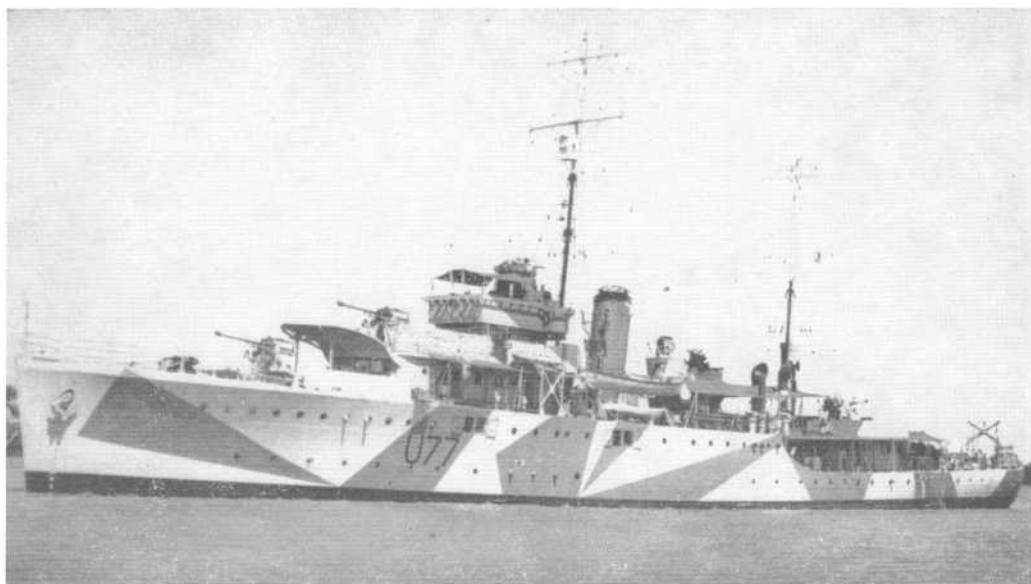
(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Norwegian Tanker *Ketty Brovig* sinking 4th March 1941.

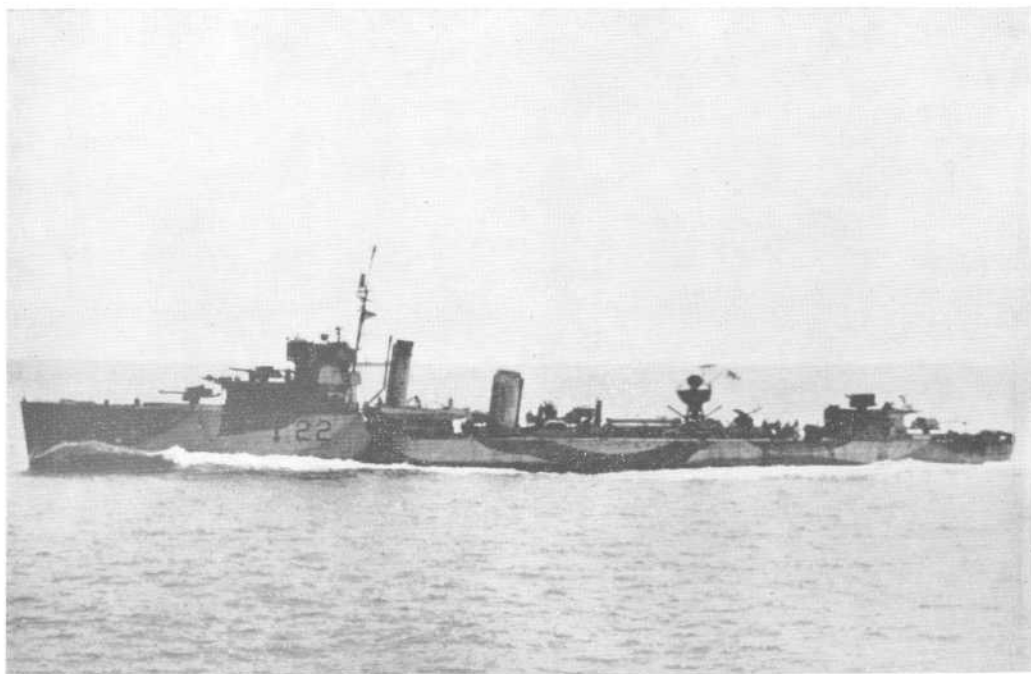


(R.A.A.F.)

German Motor Vessel *Coburg* on fire, 4th March 1941.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)
H.M.A.S. Yarra in Persian Gulf, August 1942.



(Petty Officer G. A. Balshaw, R.A.N.)
H.M.A.S. Waterhen.

saying that she was being chased by a battle cruiser in position about 275 miles east-south-east of the convoy.

The raider (as was subsequently learned) was the German "pocket battleship" *Admiral Scheer*. She entered the Indian Ocean from the Atlantic on the 3rd February. On the 14th she met *Atlantis*, *Speybank*, *Ketty Brovig* and the supply ship *Tannenfels* (7,840 tons) some 1,000 miles east of the northern tip of Madagascar, and fuelled from *Ketty Brovig*. The ships parted company on the 17th, and on the 20th *Scheer* intercepted and captured the *British Advocate* (6,994 tons) and the Greek *Grigorios C.II* (2,546 tons) 400 miles east of Dar-es-Salaam. The first-named she sent off as a prize. The other she sank. Neither ship broadcast a distress message.

On receipt of *Canadian Cruiser's* alarm the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies (Admiral Leatham), made dispositions to intercept the raider and strengthen the cover of convoy WS.5B, the four eastbound ships from which were sent in to Mombasa. In that port were *Hermes*, and *Capetown*. One hundred miles north-west of the convoy was the cruiser *Enterprise*.⁶ *Shropshire* was off the coast of Italian Somaliland supporting the army with a bombardment of Brava. The cruiser *Glasgow* was in the vicinity of *Canadian Cruiser's* position and was told to investigate immediately. *Enterprise* was instructed to proceed to cover convoy WS.5B from the south. *Emerald*, *Hawkins*, and *Capetown* were disposed to hunt the raider. On the morning of the 22nd, before the search yielded result, a further distress message was received, this time from the Dutch *Rantaupandjang* (2,542 tons), from a position some 300 miles south-east of *Canadian Cruiser's*.⁷ Then, shortly after noon, *Glasgow* reported that her aircraft had sighted a "pocket battleship" in position 8 degrees 30 minutes south, 51 degrees 35 minutes east, and that she was chasing to the south-east.

H.M.A.S. *Canberra* was at this time on passage to the Maldiv Islands from Colombo, where she had arrived on the 20th after escorting convoy US.9⁸ from Fremantle and handing it over off Colombo to H.M.N.Z.S. *Leander* for escort to Bombay. *Canberra* intercepted *Glasgow's* signal at 4.40 p.m. on the 22nd, and shortly after was directed by Leatham to proceed towards the Seychelles and join the hunt, which had by now been strengthened by *Hermes* and *Shropshire*. Later in the day Leatham was told by the Admiralty that *Australia* also could be used, and she was directed to turn convoy WS.5B (proceeding northwards at its best speed) over to *Hawkins*, and to take part in the search. The hunting group now consisted of *Hermes*, *Shropshire*, *Emerald*, *Capetown*, *Glasgow*, *Australia* and *Canberra*. For four days a fruitless search was made, and on the

⁶ HMS *Enterprise*, cruiser (1926), 7,580 tons, seven 6-in guns, sixteen 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts.

⁷ *Canadian Cruiser* and *Rantaupandjang* were both sunk by *Scheer*.

⁸ Convoy US.9: *Queen Mary*, *Aquitania*, *Mauretania*, *Nieuw Amsterdam*, left Fremantle 12 Feb 1941. On 16 Feb *Queen Mary* was detached off Sunda Strait to Singapore escorted by H.M.S. *Durban*. She reached Singapore on 18 Feb carrying the first AIF troops for Malaya. The other three ships had AIF and NZ troops for the Middle East. They were trans-shipped at Bombay and reached Suez on 15 Mar 1941 in *Nevasa*, *Khedive Ismail*, *Westernland*, *Slamat*, and *Cap Sir Jacques* (of 9,213, 7,290, 16,479, 11,636 and 8,009 tons respectively). *Parramatta* formed part of their Red Sea escort.

26th February the hunting group dispersed. It was subsequently learned that, after sighting *Glasgow's* aircraft, *Scheer* made off to the east and south, and eventually returned to the Atlantic. She rounded the Cape (some 400 miles south of it) on the 3rd March.

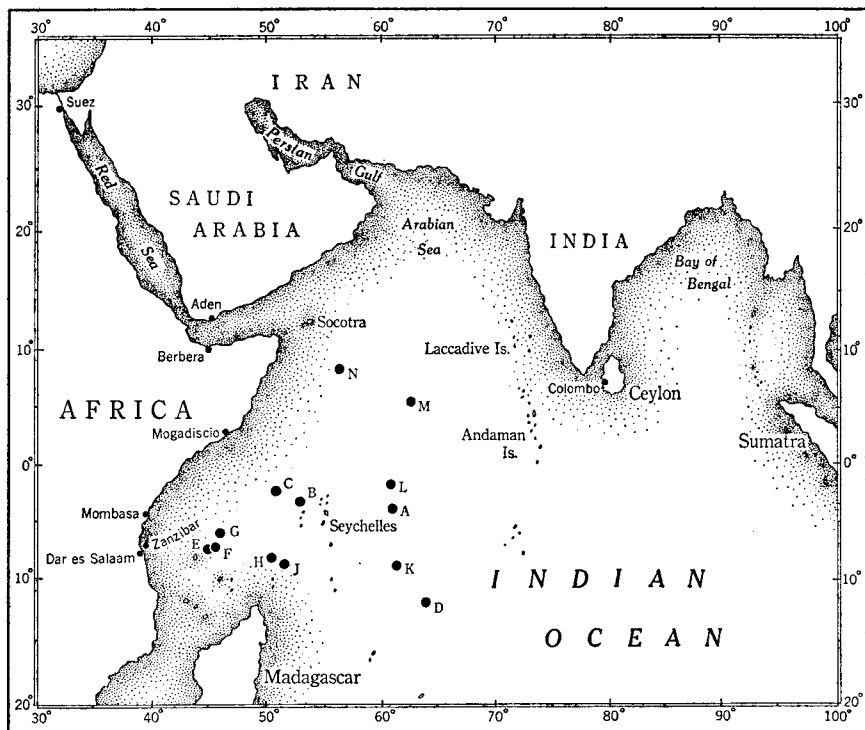
On the 20th February, the day *Canberra* and *Leander* met off Colombo, an Italian ship, *Ramb I* (3,667 tons), sailed from Massawa, where she had been fitted out as a raider. Next day she was followed by the German vessel *Coburg* (7,400 tons). Both ships successfully ran the gauntlet of the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden, and broke out into the Indian Ocean. *Ramb I* made for the Netherlands East Indies (with orders to raid merchant ships on passage); *Coburg*, unarmed, was to operate as supply ship for the German raiders. In the forenoon of 27th February *Leander*, having escorted convoy US.9 to Bombay, was patrolling west of the Maldivé Islands when she intercepted *Ramb I*. In a short, sharp action, *Ramb I* blew up. Her 103 survivors were rescued by *Leander*.

The day previously *Canberra*, under orders to rendezvous with *Leander*, sailed from Port Victoria, Seychelles, where she had gone to fuel. The two ships met on the 2nd March and searched an area between the Seychelles and Chagos Archipelago for possible raiders. The 4th March found *Canberra* steaming alone reconnoitring the northern portion of Saya de Malha Bank. Temporarily the ships had separated tactically to widen the search. The day was still and the sea calm. Visibility was extreme, and the sky clear except for isolated groups of rain clouds. At 1.53 p.m. *Canberra* catapulted her aircraft. At 4.28 p.m., when *Canberra* was in 8 degrees 42 minutes south 61 degrees 42 minutes east, steering S.S.W. at 17½ knots, the masthead lookout reported smoke on the star-board bow. *Canberra's* captain (Farncomb) altered course to close and increased to 25 knots, and six minutes later the aircraft reported two ships, shortly amplifying this to an armed raider with a tanker. (Actually, as was soon learned, the strangers were *Coburg* and *Ketty Brovig*, and when sighted *Coburg* was supplying the tanker with fresh water.) By this time the ships were in sight from *Canberra's* bridge, and had themselves sighted the cruiser. They parted company, *Coburg* to the north and the tanker to the south, and both disregarding *Canberra's* signals. Farncomb concentrated first on *Coburg*, the supposed raider. This ship disregarded a warning salvo ahead, and at 5.6 p.m. *Canberra* opened fire on her at about 21,000 yards. At this stage Farncomb still thought she was an armed raider, possibly with torpedo tubes; and with this in mind manoeuvred to keep the range over 19,000 yards. At 5.16 p.m. fire was checked when *Coburg* was seen to be on fire just abaft the bridge.

Meanwhile *Canberra's* aircraft was paying attention to *Ketty Brovig*. Lieutenant Malleson, the observer, assumed that *Canberra* would engage *Coburg*, so he decided to make the tanker heave to, and at intervals dropped four bombs close to her. The last two fell in her wake, and at about 5.10 p.m. she stopped. From his position aloft Malleson could see that both ships had taken scuttling action and were being abandoned, and so informed *Canberra*, but Farncomb refrained from closing im-

mediately "as I was still suspicious of a 'booby trap' in the merchant ship in the shape of a couple of torpedoes".

Malleson now decided to land and board the tanker before she sank.⁹ The aircraft landed alongside, and Malleson stripped and swam the



Activities of German Raiders in North-West Indian Ocean, January-May 1941

A—Raider *Atlantis* sank *Mandasor* 24 Jan 1941. B—Raider *Atlantis* captured *Speybank* 31 Jan 1941. C—Raider *Atlantis* captured *Ketty Brovig* 2 Feb 1941. D—Meeting place of raiders *Scheer* and *Atlantis*, and supply ships *Tannenfels*, *Speybank* and *Ketty Brovig* 11 Feb 1941. E—Raider *Scheer* captured *British Advocate* 20 Feb 1941. F—Raider *Scheer* sank *Grigorios C.II* 21 Feb 1941. G—Raider *Scheer* sank *Canadian Cruiser* 21 Feb 1941. H—Raider *Scheer* sank *Rantaupandjang* 22 Feb 1941. J—Raider *Scheer* sighted by aircraft from *Glasgow* 22 Feb 1941. K—*Canberra* at sinking of *Coburg* and *Ketty Brovig* 4 Mar 1941. L—Raider *Pinguin* sank *Empire Light* 25 Apr 1941. M—Raider *Pinguin* sank *Clan Buchanan* 28 Apr 1941. N—Raider *Pinguin* sank *British Emperor* 7 May 1941.

twenty yards or so to the ship. "I regret," he later wrote, "that the sensible course of using the rubber dinghy did not occur to me, and for my own peace of mind I did not see the several sharks that were cruising round until I was safely back in the aircraft." He made a hasty survey of the

⁹ The aircraft's crew were Lt C. V. S. Malleson, RN, observer; Flight Lt P. O. Lavarack, RAAF, pilot; and Leading Telegraphist E. M. Hutchison, RAN, wireless operator.

ship, collected what papers he could, and signalled *Canberra* that she might be saved if a salvage party were sent immediately.

At 6.38 p.m. *Leander* appeared on the scene and was requested to stand by *Coburg* while *Canberra* closed *Ketty Brovig* and sent a party on board. It was, however, not possible to save her. She was badly down by the stern. Engine and boiler rooms were full of scalding water; and water was lapping in the open ports of the after accommodation. In an endeavour to close these one of the boarding party had an unpleasant few minutes when a wave swept through the port he was trying to secure, flooded the room he was in, and slammed and jammed the door. He was, however, released with a wetting and the loss of his boots.

Before *Leander* could reach *Coburg*, that ship sank, at 6.50 p.m., and *Leander* picked up her crew. *Ketty Brovig* was slower, and her end was hastened by a few rounds of 4-inch shells from *Canberra*, who picked up the Germans, Norwegians, and Chinese who formed her company.

Only half an hour elapsed from the time *Canberra's* ship's company was aware of the presence of an enemy and the time of opening fire, and the initial excitement persisted for some time after closing up at action stations. In consequence various minor mistakes in drill were made. As Farncomb later remarked:

It should be remembered that *Canberra* has carried out many abortive air reconnaissances in the past few months with greater expectation of meeting an enemy than on this occasion. . . . The "shoot" on the 4th March was an excellent rehearsal for the real thing, with the added advantage that the enemy was unable to profit by our errors.

As it was, no harm was done; but 215 rounds of 8-inch ammunition were fired in the "shoot". The two enemy ships took scuttling action with such celerity that their loss could not in any case have been prevented. Down in the engine and boiler rooms of *Canberra* a description of the happenings above was passed over the loud speakers from time to time and, reported the Commander (E)¹ "held the ratings' interest more than a broadcast description of a Test Match with Bradman batting against Larwood".

So far as the enemy was concerned the loss of *Ketty Brovig* was not known beyond those immediately concerned for nearly two months, and caused considerable derangement of German plans for refuelling raiders in the Indian Ocean.

IV

Convoy WS.5B reached Suez safely on the 2nd March with *Parramatta* in the Red Sea escort. Back in Aden on the 3rd, the Australian sloop sailed again on the 5th escorting convoy US.9 through the Red Sea. Good news continued to reach Walker. He was told to be prepared for operational duty in support of General Platt's advance on Massawa; and on his way south with a Red Sea convoy on the 17th March he noted that Berbera was retaken by combined British forces on the previous day. For

¹ Cdr O. F. McMahon, OBE; RAN. Cdr(E) *Canberra* 1938-42; Dep Engr Manager Garden Island, Sydney, 1942-46. Of Malanda, Qld; b. Mareeba, Qld, 15 Jan 1900.

the rest of the month *Parramatta* was on Perim patrol, which was strengthened to intercept any ships attempting to escape from Massawa or the more southerly port of Assab. One ship, the German *Oder* (8,516 tons), was intercepted by the sloop *Shoreham* on the 23rd March, and scuttled herself immediately she was challenged; and *Bertram Rickmers* (4,188 tons) which left Massawa on the 29th was intercepted by H.M.S. *Kandahar*. At the end of the month *Parramatta* was in Port Sudan for an operation designed to establish at Marsa Kuba, thirty-seven miles north of Massawa, an advanced base for Platt's coastal forces. *Parramatta's* task, assisted by the destroyer *Kingston*, was to sweep a channel clear of mines for a convoy of pontoons and supply ships. By this time Massawa was invested, but forts on the mainland and off-lying islands were unsubdued, and attack was possible by destroyers, motor torpedo boats, and submarines.² On the 1st April a Swordfish aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm (seventeen of which, from *Eagle*, were operating from Port Sudan in support of the advance on Massawa) sighted one destroyer (*Leone*³) aground or scuttled off Norah Island, 40 miles from Massawa. Two days later four large destroyers were sighted by Fleet Air Arm aircraft nineteen miles off Port Sudan. They were bombed, and two of them (*Nazario Sauro* and *Daniele Manin*⁴) were driven ashore. The remaining two (*Pantera* and *Tigre*⁵) beached themselves on the Arabian shore south of Jedda, where they were destroyed by *Kingston* and R.A.F. aircraft. The last of the seven original large destroyers, *Cesare Battisti*,⁶ scuttled herself off the Arabian shore on the 4th.

The flotilla of four destroyers sighted off Port Sudan left Massawa on the 2nd, and apparently passed close to *Parramatta* when that ship was patrolling off Massawa on the night 2nd-3rd April, but contact was not made; nor did *Parramatta* meet any opposition from other vessels or the forts during her operations. She successfully guided the pontoon convoy and supply ships into Marsa Kuba on the 5th April, and a pontoon jetty was established and stores unloaded, facilitating the capture of Massawa on the 8th April. A few hours before the surrender, the Italian navy at Massawa made a final gesture. At 1 a.m. on the 8th *Parramatta*, at anchor off Marsa Kuba, received from *Capetown*, patrolling in the offing, a signal to say she had been torpedoed. With the Indian sloop *Indus*, *Parramatta* weighed and stood by the damaged cruiser, and later the Australian ship towed her to Port Sudan, where they arrived on the 10th.⁷

² When Italy entered the war her Red Sea force comprised 7 large destroyers, *Francesco Nullo*, *Nazario Sauro*, *Daniele Manin*, *Pantera*, *Tigre*, *Leone*, and *Cesare Battisti*; two small destroyers, *Vincenzo Orsini* and *Giovanni Acerbi*; eight submarines; a sloop, *Eritrea*; two armed merchant cruisers, *Ramb I* and *Ramb II*; and eight minor vessels. *Francesco Nullo* was sunk in October 1940 (Chapter 5), and *Ramb I* was sunk by *Leander* in February 1941 as stated above. *Eritrea* and *Ramb II* succeeded in escaping early in 1941. *Eritrea* was reported to have reached Kobe on 22 March 1941. *Ramb II* was sunk by HMS *Triumph* on 30 May.

³ *Leone*, Italian destroyer (1923), 1,526 tons, eight 4.7-in guns, six 18-in torp tubes, 34 kts.

⁴ *Nazario Sauro* and *Daniele Manin*, Italian destroyers (1926), 1,058 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 35 kts.

⁵ *Pantera* and *Tigre*, Italian destroyers (1924), 1,526 tons, eight 4.7-in guns, six 18-in torp tubes, 34 kts.

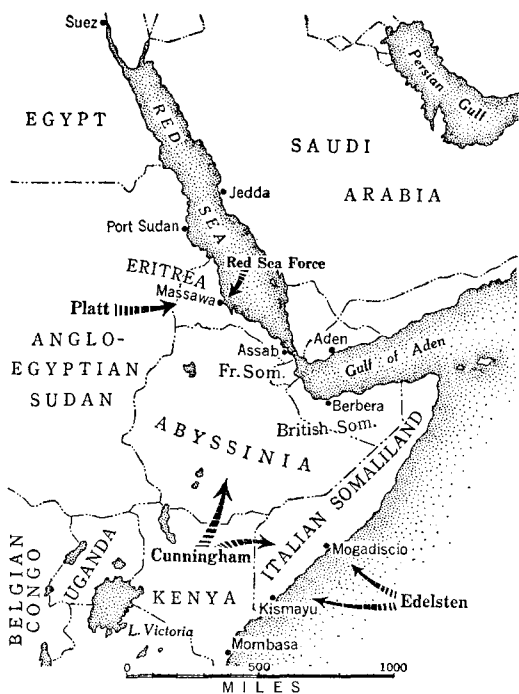
⁶ *Cesare Battisti*, Italian destroyer (1926), 1,058 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 35 kts.

⁷ *Capetown* was torpedoed by an Italian motor torpedo boat which was not sighted. After temporary repairs at Port Sudan she was towed to Bombay in May for permanent repair.

Parramatta was back off Massawa the following day, and assisted in sweeping a channel to the port, a number of mines being cut and sunk. It was desired to establish a British naval staff at Massawa as early as possible, and on the 14th April Walker sent his motor-boat (from the then limit of the swept channel about fourteen miles from Massawa) into the port with staff officers on board. "Thus," he wrote, "the first British naval officer to reach Massawa by sea was Lieutenant G. W. A. Langford,⁸ R.A.N., in charge of my boat."

Parramatta herself anchored off Massawa harbour the following morning, and Walker found that "the Italian naval base presented a strange sight, as scuttled merchant ships lay in fantastic positions in the various fairways and the harbours". Among the scuttled vessels found there were the two small destroyers *Vincenzo Orsini* and *Giovanni Acerbi*.⁹

The occupation of Massawa virtually completed the conquest of Eritrea and lessened the possibility of attack on ships in the Red Sea and its approaches. One important result was that on the 11th April President Roosevelt issued an order declaring the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden no longer "combat zones"¹ and thus now open for United States merchant ships. The possibility of attack by surface raider or submarine, at any rate in the Gulf of Aden or nearby ocean area, remained. This was evidenced later in April and early the following month, when three British ships, *Empire Light* (6,537 tons), *Clan Buchanan* (7,266 tons) and *British Emperor* (3,663 tons), were intercepted and sunk by the German raider *Pinguin*, in the north-west Indian Ocean. *Pinguin*, after



⁸ Lt G. W. A. Langford; RAN. 1st Lt *Parramatta* 1940, temp CO 1941. Of Roseville, NSW; b. 27 Aug 1912. Lost in sinking of *Parramatta*, 27 Nov 1941.

⁹ *Giovanni Acerbi*, Italian destroyer (1916), 669 tons, six 4-in guns, four 18-in torp tubes, 33 kts; bombed by British naval aircraft, 1 Apr 1941.

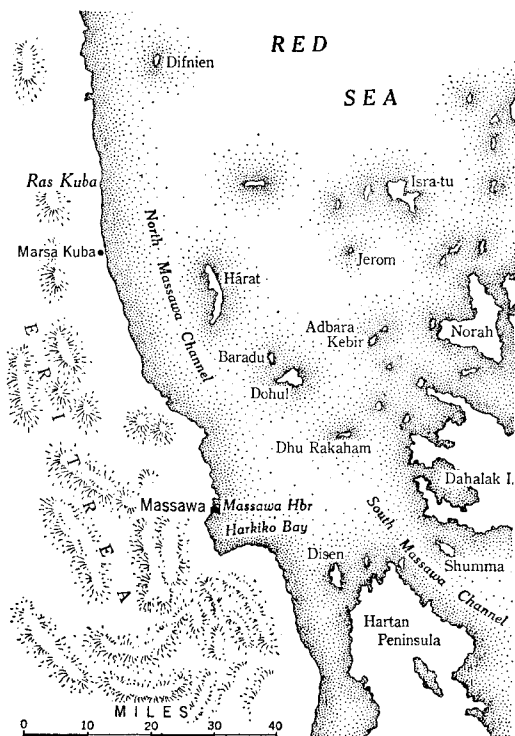
¹ In Nov 1939 the provision of the U.S. *Neutrality Act*, which forbade the entry of American merchant ships into defined "combat zones", came into force.

her activities off Australia and in the southern Indian Ocean (Chapter 6), operated in the Antarctic and South Atlantic, and in March 1941 spent some days at Kerguelen refitting, before proceeding north in the Indian Ocean. Here her presence was disclosed by a distress message from *Clan Buchanan*. In the afternoon of 8th May she was intercepted by H.M.S. *Cornwall*, and in the resulting sharp engagement she blew up and sank.

The improved situation south of Suez enabled the release of a number of ships of the Red Sea Force for service in the Mediterranean, among them *Parramatta*. Before

leaving she spent a few hours in Massawa harbour, and there embarked the three ratings from *Hobart*, Jones,² Sweeney³ and Hurren,⁴ who were captured at Berbera and recovered by the army at Adi Ugri (some fifty miles south-west of Massawa) when that point was taken on the 1st April. Petty Officer Lewis⁵ of *Parramatta* said that the three men "nearly died of excitement" when they found they were to be embarked in an Australian ship.⁶ They were landed at Suez, and went on to Australia in *Queen Mary*, which, in company with *Queen Elizabeth* as convoy US.10A, and escorted as far as Perim by *Canberra*, reached Suez on 3rd May, the same day as *Parramatta*. On the 1st June

(after some days at Suez during which she refloated the steamer *Mount Othrys* (4,817 tons) aground on a sand spit, was degaussed, and met *Vampire* bound for Australia) *Parramatta* entered the Suez Canal, and reached Alexandria on the 3rd June. She had spent nearly forty unbroken weeks in the Red Sea. Before she left it, Walker and his crew had the



² PO H. Jones, 19657, RAN. HMAS's *Hobart* 1939-40, *Australia* 1943. Of Kalgoorlie, WA; b. Kalgoorlie, 14 Nov 1914.

³ AB H. C. Sweeney, 19348, RAN. HMAS *Hobart* 1938-40. Of Brisbane; b. Dalby, Qld, 19 Jun 1911.

⁴ AB W. J. Hurren, 21641, RAN. HMAS's *Hobart* 1938-40, 1945-46, *Bataan* 1945, 1946-47. Labourer; of Brisbane; b. Plymouth, Eng, 9 Apr 1919.

⁵ PO S. F. Lewis, 12037, RAN. HMAS's *Parramatta* 1940-41, *Moresby* 1943-44. Of Maylands, WA; b. Maylands, 8 May 1904.

⁶ P. and F. M. McGuire, *The Price of Admiralty* (1944), p. 236.

satisfaction of receiving from Admiral Leatham the signal: "I am sorry to lose your services which have been invaluable. Good luck to you all", and of learning that the Duke of Aosta, Italian Governor of Abyssinia and Commander-in-Chief East Africa, had surrendered on the 19th May. The East African campaign was won.

V

Britain, from the time of Napoleon, realised the importance of the Middle East, at the crossroads between Europe, Asia, and Africa; and it gained additional strategical importance to her in the earlier years of the twentieth century with the substitution of oil fuel for coal in the Royal Navy and the Admiralty purchase of a controlling interest in the Anglo-Persian oil company. In 1939, though the Middle East states had strong nationalist aspirations, Britain was the greatest power in the area: but the defeat of France and the German successes in 1940 reduced Britain's prestige, particularly in Iraq and Persia.

After the first world war Iraq was placed under British mandate. Subsequently Britain undertook to recognise Iraq as an independent state, and in 1930 a treaty was signed under which Britain was given the right to maintain peacetime air bases near Basra at the head of the Persian Gulf, and at Habbaniya some 300 miles to the north-west; and have the right of transit for military forces and supplies at all times, while in war she should have "all facilities and assistance". In return, Iraq received the promise of assistance in the event of war, and sponsorship for entry to the League of Nations.

The security of Persia was vital to Britain, with its great oil producing areas to the north of the Gulf, and the refinery and shipping port of Abadan on the Shatt-el-Arab. Britain's policy towards Persia had been to encourage her independence and court her friendship; but German prestige stood high, and an active German mission was installed in the capital, Teheran.

The Persian Gulf, covering an area of some 97,000 square miles, and joined to the Gulf of Oman by the 29-mile wide Strait of Hormuz, is almost an inland sea. Its length from the coast of Oman to the head of the Gulf is about 500 miles; its width varies from 180 miles to the 29 miles of the Strait. Within the Strait the Gulf is very shallow, and deep soundings range from 40 to 50 fathoms, with the line of greatest depth nearer the Persian than the Arabian coast. Numerous islands dot the expanse of the Gulf, especially in the western part. Those of the Persian littoral are rocky and scarped; those on the Arabian side are shoal islands and coral islets. Cool, dry and bracing from November to April, the Gulf is hot and humid in the summer, with maximum temperatures ranging between 108 and 120 degrees. As with the Red Sea, navigation is tricky, with high refraction causing false horizons. By night the richly phosphorescent water marks a ship's passage in coils and flashes of green light. Adjacent to the north-eastern boundary of Kuwait at the head of

the Gulf, Iraq had a narrow but important entrance in the Shatt-el-Arab, the confluence of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. For some fifty miles from the coast the left bank of the Shatt-el-Arab formed the boundary between Iraq and Persia. Within this narrow entrance Iraq expanded into a large country north to Turkey, north-west to Syria, and west to Jordan.

On the 2nd May, the day before *Parramatta* reached Suez on her way to the Mediterranean, Walker recorded that "hostilities commenced against Iraq this day". The event was the culmination of some months of Axis intrigue and of the overthrow of the Iraqi government by a *coup d'état*; and closely concerned *Parramatta's* sister *Yarra*, then in approximately *Parramatta's* latitude but some 1,000 miles to the eastward, at the head of the Persian Gulf.

German leaders had for long recognised the importance of fomenting Arab opposition to Britain and France in the Middle East, and some months before the outbreak of war had, in 1938, taken steps to establish there organisations willing to work for a Pan-Arab united front with German support. When, early in March 1941, the British proposed stationing troops in Iraq with right of transit in the terms of the treaty, the proposal was opposed by the Iraqi Government, and Germany and Italy were given to understand that this opposition would be backed by military action if arms were forthcoming from the Axis powers. The Germans tried to arrange delivery of arms via Turkey and Persia, and from Japan.

On the night of the 3rd-4th April 1941 the existing Cabinet in Iraq, some members of which were inclined to agree to the British proposals, was overthrown by a *coup d'état*, and the pro-German Rashid Ali became Prime Minister. The pro-British Regent, Amir Abdul Illah, took refuge in H.M.S. *Cockchafer*⁷ at Basra. Britain wasted no time in getting troops to Iraq and early in April, by arrangement with the Indian Government, a brigade group and regiment of field artillery already embarked at Karachi for Malaya were diverted to Basra. *Yarra* was part of the escort.

Yarra left the Red Sea in the middle of March for Bombay, where she docked and refitted until 9th April. On that date she sailed for Aden, but the following day was diverted to Karachi where she arrived on the 11th. On the 12th she sailed as escort to the Basra convoy of eight ships (BM.7) and reached Basra (being joined en route by H.M. Ships *Falmouth* and *Cockchafer*) on the 18th. H.M.S. *Emerald* was there, and a few hours later the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies (Leatham), arrived in *Leander*. The landing of the troops at Basra was unopposed and the official attitude was friendly; but the Iraqi Government said no more troops could land until those already in Iraq moved on. The British Government replied that in view of the situation in Egypt, additional troops were already on their way. (They were in convoy BP.1, which left India on the 22nd April.)

Leander, with Leatham, left Basra for Colombo on the 23rd April. In view of possible opposition to the forthcoming landing, H.M. Ships *Hermes* and *Enterprise* were disposed in a covering position thirty miles

⁷ HMS *Cockchafer*, river gunboat (1915), 625 tons, two 6-in guns, 14 kts.

south of the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab; but convoy BP.1 arrived without incident on the 28th April, and was escorted from the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab to Basra by *Yarra*. The incident, however, forced Rashid Ali's hand. On 30th April Iraqi troops concentrated around the R.A.F. establishment at Habbaniya. On the 2nd May they opened fire on the British cantonments and the two countries were at war.

Axis help for Iraq was inadequate and tardy. It was the 9th May before the German Foreign Office told Rashid Ali their proposed supporting measures, which included making Syria available as a supply base and sending to Iraq a first bomber formation of twenty aircraft. Four more days passed before the first German aircraft, and first trainload of supplies from Syria, reached Mosul. By then the siege of Habbaniya was over, the Iraqi forces were in retreat towards Baghdad, and the Iraqi air force had been virtually destroyed. On the 29th of the month the British were attacking Baghdad, and on the 30th Rashid Ali and the most senior officers fled to Persia. The following day, 31st May, an armistice was signed, Amir Abdul Illah was reinstated as Regent, and a new Government took office. British forces rapidly occupied all the important points in the country.

Yarra's service in the war with Iraq, carried out under the orders of the Senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf⁸ (Commodore Cosmo Graham⁹) was in the Shatt-el-Arab. For the first three weeks of May she operated in support of land forces occupying Basra and its port of Ashar, securing a bridge over Qarmat Ali Creek above Ashar to prevent the arrival of enemy reinforcements, and occupying Fao at the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab. On the 2nd of the month the Iraqis, who had previously mined the Qarmat Ali bridge, attempted to destroy it in the face of attack by a platoon of Sikhs advancing from the south. The charge misfired, and *Yarra* landed her Gunner,¹ who withdrew the charges. They, Harrington recorded, "were found to consist of wet guncotton manufactured at Waltham Abbey in 1937. Misfire due to most inefficient fitting of primer".

On the 24th May Harrington commanded the naval force in the combined operation "Scoop", the object of which was "to attack and disperse all enemy found on the right bank of the Shatt-el-Arab in the vicinity of Habib Shawi [some seven miles up river from Ashar] and to inflict maximum casualties". The naval task was to bombard objectives, to land two companies of Gurkhas and battalion headquarters, and subsequently to re-embark the force landed and cover the withdrawal.

The operation was preceded, on the night of the 22nd-23rd, by a reconnaissance of the landing position when six ratings from *Yarra*, disguised as Arab fishermen in a native bellum, took soundings. Harrington's flotilla, *Yarra*, the tugs *Souriya* and *Shamal*, and two native mahailas, weighed

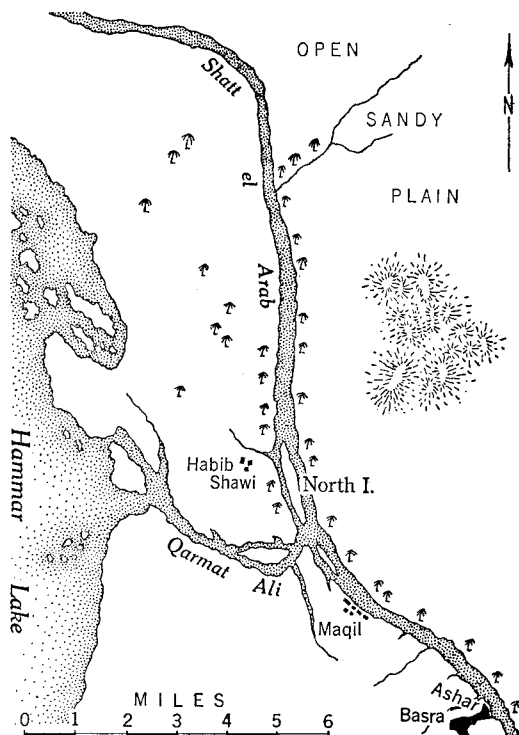
⁸ The short title was SNOGP, and the verbal reference was always to "Snop-Gee".

⁹ Rear-Adm C. M. Graham, CB; RN. (Comd HMS's *Victor* 1916-17, *Springbok* 1917-19.) Comd HMS *Shoreham* 1939-41, and SNO Persian Gulf 1939-42; Cmdre Cdg Burma Coast 1942; FO Cdg Humber Area 1942-45. B. 13 Feb 1887. Died 5 Nov 1946.

¹ Gnr (later Lt) J. S. Godfrey, MBE; RAN. HMAS *Yarra* 1938-41; HMAS *Australia* 1941-42. Of Earlwood, NSW; b. Darlinghurst, NSW, 25 Oct 1899.

from Ma'qil, just above Ashar, at 3.20 a.m. on the 24th. *Yarra* had on board the battalion headquarters and two trench-mortars with a crew of Iraq levies; the two companies of Gurkhas were in the tugs. They were in position upstream at 4 a.m., and *Yarra* opened fire on two main objectives, "Big House" and a date godown, covered the landing with a smoke screen, and later engaged targets of opportunity farther upstream. By 9.42 a.m. *Yarra* was back in her berth at Ma'qil, the operation, Harrington recorded, "being successfully completed, and 'Big House' and 'South Village' being left in flames. Expenditure of ammunition—43 rounds 4-inch H.E., 216 rounds 0.5-inch and 550 rounds .303-inch". On the 31st May, the day the armistice was signed, *Yarra* was at anchor off Ashar.

The conduct of *Yarra's* company during this period was, Harrington recorded, "excellent", but health was "lamentable. The sick list now numbers about 25, and it appears will remain at about this figure during the malaria season. . . . Only one signalman now remains off the sick list. . . . At present, due to sickness, only two guns can be manned." All, however, remained cheerful and willing, and *Yarra's* only casualties at this period were those caused by mosquitoes.



VI

Britain's success in Iraq was simultaneous with her failure in Crete. On the 31st May, the date the armistice was signed in Baghdad, the final embarkation from Sfakia was carried out. Possession of Syria now became of first importance; and here the Germans had established a foothold in connection with their efforts to support Iraq.

For some weeks the future of Syria had been a subject of concern to the British Government and of discussion between it and General Wavell. In a message to Mr Churchill on the 22nd May, Wavell remarked that:

German Air Force established in Syria are closer to the Canal and Suez than they would be at Mersa Matruh. . . . The whole position in Middle East is at present governed mainly by air-power and air bases. Enemy air bases in Greece make our hold of Crete precarious, and enemy air bases in Cyrenaica, Crete, Cyprus and Syria would make our hold on Egypt difficult. The object of the army must be to force the enemy in Cyrenaica as far west as possible, to try to keep him from establishing himself in Syria, and to hang on to Crete and Cyprus.

Wavell was, he said, moving reinforcements to Palestine "after full discussion with Cunningham, Tedder and Blamey, because we feel we must be prepared for action against Syria, and weak action is useless".

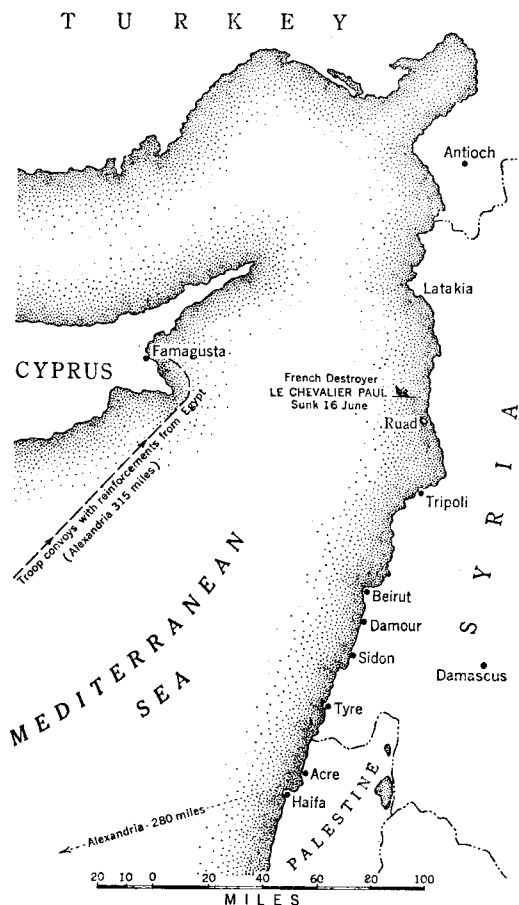
The foremost German agent in Syria was Rudolph Rahn, Counsellor at the German Embassy in Paris. His mission in Syria was twofold, to organise a supply base for Iraq, and to organise Syria against possible British attack. He secured the confidence and cooperation of General Dentz, Vichy High Commissioner in Syria and Commander-in-Chief French Forces in the Levant, but was handicapped by the inability to secure reinforcements for the defence of the country. The German High Command was desirous of holding Syria, but was preoccupied with the impending attack on Russia, of which Rahn was apparently unaware. As a preliminary to that attack, Germany was negotiating a pact of friendship with Turkey (it was signed on the 18th June) and this precluded any immediate German support of Syria by land from the north. Both the German and Italian High Commands regarded Cyprus as the key to the defence of Syria, but the severe handling German airborne troops and paratroops had received in Crete made impossible their immediate use in any attempt to take Cyprus, which was more favourably placed for British defence. A German suggestion that the Italians should invade Cyprus from the Dodecanese, with German air support, came to nothing. Rahn's endeavour, therefore, was to delay any possible British attack on Syria by concealing as far as could be any German activity there which would encourage such attack. As stated above, however, Britain was aware of the Axis foothold in Syria, and of its dangers. Early on the 8th June, British and Australian troops attacked in the south from Palestine and Transjordan.

The Syrian campaign, fought in a country with a restricted coastal corridor and a vital coast road with long stretches in full view from the sea, was ideal for naval cooperation. There were, however, a number of naval problems: the difficulty of finding ships after the losses and exhaustion of the Greek and Crete campaigns; enemy air attack which largely confined naval movements to darkness hours unless continuous fighter protection could be given; and the presence of two large French flotilla leaders (almost in the category of light cruisers), three submarines, and some smaller vessels at Beirut. As a further complication, what Admiral Cunningham later described as "this comparatively petty campaign" absorbed the entire effort of all reconnaissance aircraft available for naval cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean excepting those based on Malta; and even so, reconnaissance was inadequate. The available aircraft of the

Fleet Air Arm had to be concentrated in Cyprus for reconnaissance to the north and west against the arrival of enemy reinforcements. Reconnaissance on the Syrian coast had to be left to aircraft of the Palestine and Transjordan Command, which had no sea experience and consequently made some misleading reports—in one instance resulting in *Perth* being bombed by our own aircraft.

Naval operations were under the command of Vice-Admiral King (15th Cruiser Squadron) who left Alexandria on the 7th June in *Phoebe*, with *Ajax*, *Kandahar*, *Kimberley*, *Janus* and *Jackal*. The day previously *Glengyle*, escorted by *Isis* and *Hotspur*, had left Port Said with commando troops to land at the Litani River, just north of Tyre, and capture Khan bridge. The initial attempt, made on the night of 7th-8th June, was abandoned owing to heavy surf on the beaches. *Glengyle* returned to Port Said and *Isis* and *Hotspur*, with *Coventry*, joined King at 6 a.m. on the 8th. Shortly after, King's force closed the coast south of Tyre and tried to gain touch with the head of the army column, but the situation ashore was not clear to King until 3.30 p.m., when it appeared that Tyre had been captured. *Kimberley* carried out the initial naval bombardment of the campaign on some French positions near Khan bridge between 8 and 9 p.m.

Early in the morning of the 9th the force closed the coast to support *Glengyle* in the second landing attempt (which was successful) at the Litani River; after which King stood off to the westward. The French flotilla leaders, *Guépard* and *Valmy*,² apparently well served by air recon-



² *Guépard* and *Valmy*, French destroyers (1929-30), 2,436 tons, five 5.4-in guns, six 21.7-in torp tubes, 35.5 kts; scuttled at Toulon, 27 Nov 1942.

naissance, seized the chance to sneak in and bombard Australian troops on both banks of the river. King heard of this just after 10 a.m. and closed the coast at full speed but the French ships had gone, driven off by artillery fire of the 2/4th Regiment. In the early afternoon they were encountered off Sidon by four of King's destroyers, *Janus* (Senior Officer), *Hotspur*, *Jackal* and *Isis*. The Frenchmen had the advantage in speed and range, and *Janus*, some way ahead of her consorts, at the outset bore the brunt of the enemy fire. She received five hits, which killed or wounded all on the bridge except the captain, and disabled and stopped the ship. She was quickly supported by the others, whereupon the French ships retired at high speed to Beirut, easily outdistancing the pursuing British. Later that evening *Phoebe*, at the request of the Naval Liaison Officer ashore, bombarded supposed enemy positions on the northern side of Khan bridge, but the ridge fired on was in fact then occupied by Australian troops. The following morning, however, *Kandahar* and *Kimberley* carried out a most useful bombardment of French motor-transport, tanks, and ammunition dumps north of Khan bridge; and on the 11th a naval officer was attached to the Australian 7th Division Headquarters as a visual signal link with the destroyers. Thereafter calls for naval fire were made and answered with accuracy and rapidity.

Throughout June King's force operated along the coast, in support of the army and guarding against enemy reinforcement from the sea. Its composition changed from time to time as other ships became available, including *Stuart*, *Nizam* and *Perth*. *Stuart* was the first Australian ship to join, on the 10th, and remained until the 13th. Her spells of duty consisted of patrolling in support of the inshore bombarding forces. "Our Syrian effort," one of her company later remarked, "was very short-lived and taking it all round not very exciting."³ *Nizam*, having followed Crete with a "ferry" run between Alexandria and Tobruk, joined King's force in company with *Naiad* (which now became flagship), *Kingston* and *Jaguar*, on the 17th June. *Perth*, after making good in Alexandria the damage suffered in the Crete campaign, joined nine days later, on the 26th, relieving the New Zealand *Leander*, which had been with the force since the 13th.

Compared with the strain and vicissitudes of the Greece and Crete campaigns, that of Syria was something of a relaxation for the navy. Of sailing for Alexandria for five days' boiler cleaning after a week with the force, Hodgkinson, *Hotspur's* 1st Lieutenant, wrote:

In a way it was a pity to leave the Syrian coast. After Greece and Crete it was an excellent tonic to be doing something aggressive again. Everybody loved Haifa [there were "excellent dinners at Pross's"] and it is always more pleasant to work with a small independent squadron than to work with the battle fleet.

And, on returning five days later to the force:

The Syrian campaign for the next three weeks was a honeymoon. The weather was perfect. At last we had a real squadron of fighters overhead, and each time

³ Clifford, *The Leader of the Crocks* (1945), p. 189.

we went out, which was only about half the time, we had some amusement. The other half was spent in harbour.⁴

However, the campaign had its moments of encounter. German aircraft put in more than one appearance. In the evening of the 15th June German dive bombers severely damaged *Isis* with near misses; and two hours later a formation of sixteen or so French aircraft attacked the force and similarly damaged and incapacitated *Ilex*. Two French destroyers of the *Cassard*⁵ class attempted to reinforce their forces from the west. One, *Le Chevalier Paul*,⁶ was sunk, by Fleet Air Arm aircraft from Cyprus, north of Rouad Island (off the Syrian coast between Tripoli and Latakia) on the 16th June. The other succeeded in reaching Beirut under strong air escort on the 21st.

Guépard and *Valmy* made frequent sorties and tip-and-run raids, both singly and in company; and King's force was continuously on the watch for them. There was a brief encounter on the 14th June, described by Cunningham as "merely irritating". They kept out of range and retired within their shore defences. There was a more promising meeting in the early morning of the 23rd. King in *Naiad*, with *Leander*, *Jaguar*, *Kingston* and *Nizam*, was about ten miles north of Beirut ("which was brilliantly lit as if there were no war")⁷ sweeping south in search of the enemy ships. *Jervis*, *Havock*, *Hotspur* and *Decoy* were on anti-submarine patrol in the offing. At 1.48 a.m. *Naiad* sighted the two French ships on a northerly course close inshore, distant about 5,000 yards. They turned away making smoke, and retired under the coast defence battery of Nahr el Kelb, which opened fire; and were engaged by King's force for some eleven minutes. At the time it was believed by the British that several hits were scored on the enemy; but this was subsequently found to be incorrect. Only one French destroyer was hit, by a 6-inch shell from *Leander*, stated to have been blind.

The British force, however, did considerable material damage to the French ashore in bombardments, and had a marked influence in lowering the defenders' morale. *Perth*, when bombarding in company with *Naiad*, *Kandahar*, *Kingston*, *Havock* and *Griffin* on the 2nd July, earned a special mention from Admiral King for accurate shooting at a battery at Abey in the Damour area, in which she destroyed four guns and blew up an ammunition dump. It was when south of Tyre on the return from this bombardment that the force was reported by a British reconnaissance aircraft as "three French destroyers with three merchant ships", and *Perth* was bombed. Fortunately the bombs fell wide.

⁴ Hodgkinson, *Before the Tide Turned*, pp. 164-5. Hodgkinson tells a story of *Nizam*, lying outside *Hotspur* during one of their spells alongside in Haifa. Some of *Nizam's* liberty men "discovered a lighter lying ahead of us completely unguarded by the army. And guess what was in that lighter. It's hardly conceivable, but it was beer. Some of the sailors were still tight next morning, and one insisted on falling in with the *Hotspurs* and scrubbing our decks instead of theirs, and he had to be led gently back. Windfalls like that aren't common." (p. 168.)

⁵ *Cassard*, French destroyer (1932), 2,441 tons, five 5.4-in guns, seven 21.7-in torp tubes, 36 kts; scuttled at Toulon, 27 Nov 1942.

⁶ *Le Chevalier Paul*, French destroyer (1932), 2,441 tons, five 5.4-in guns, seven 21.7-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

⁷ Hodgkinson, *Before the Tide Turned*, p. 165.

Damascus was captured by Australian and Free French troops on the 21st June, but for some days the advance on the coast was halted while progress was made inland. It was resumed on the 4th July, when *Naiad*, *Ajax*, *Jackal*, *Nizam*, *Kimberley*, *Havock* and *Hasty* carried out a preliminary bombardment. Bombardment support was given on the 5th, 6th and 7th, as the army made steady progress against stiff opposition; and on the 7th King recorded that by the end of that day "it was clear that the capture of Damour [the last strong defensive position before Beirut] was only a matter of time". It was captured by the 7th Australian Division on the 9th. On that day General Dentz asked for an armistice, and hostilities ceased at one minute past midnight on the 11th. The armistice was signed at Acre on the 14th July at 8 p.m. and on that day King, with most of his force, including *Perth*, sailed from Haifa for Alexandria.

Of the naval participation in the Syrian campaign, Admiral Cunningham recorded that at the outset:

Both the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Forces, and the General Officer Commanding, Palestine and Transjordan, were not a little sceptical of the value of having naval forces operating on the flank, in spite of experience in the Cyrenaican campaign. It was actually suggested that owing to their need for fighter defence they should be withdrawn from the flank of the army so that the fighters could be released for army support. This produced a categorical statement from the Brigadier on the left that he would prefer to be without fighters rather than lose his naval support on the left flank.

General Lavarack, in his report on operations of the I Australian Corps, listed

Two factors of the highest importance which contributed to the British victory . . . the bombardments provided in the coastal sector by the Royal Navy, and our superiority in the air. . . . The naval bombardments caused a great deal of destruction of enemy transport and armoured fighting vehicles on the coast road, engaged (frequently with good effect) the enemy's gun positions, and last, but not least, caused a considerable deterioration in morale amongst troops exposed, without hope of retaliation and little of protection, to the gruelling flank fire from the sea.⁸

The success of the campaign in Syria improved Britain's strategic position in the Middle East. It was followed immediately by the considerable reinforcement of Cyprus, which began on the 18th July. Two Australian ships took part in the initial movement from Port Said. The Australian merchant ship *Salamaua* (6,676 tons) carried the motor transport of the 20th H.A. Battery and No. 80 Fighter Squadron of the Royal Air Force, and was escorted by *Parramatta*, which ship thus made the first of a number of passages to Famagusta. The operation continued until the 29th August, and employed numerous ships, including *Hobart*, which joined the Mediterranean Station early in that month. With the safeguarding of Cyprus and the occupation of Syria, enemy penetration eastward from the Mediterranean was forestalled; the defence of Egypt and the Suez Canal was extended northwards; and the relief on her southern frontier strengthened and comforted Turkey. By now, however, Germany

⁸ According to a statement by Rahn, in the early stages of the campaign naval bombardments caused 3,000 casualties in a few days.

was advancing eastward north of the Black Sea. On the 22nd June 1941 German armies invaded Russia. By the middle of August they were approaching Leningrad in the north, had captured Smolensk in the centre, and were threatening the Crimea in the south.

VII

In September 1941 Commodore Cosmo Graham, Senior Naval Officer Persian Gulf, wrote in his "Report on Operation COUNTENANCE": "With the German advance into Russia the Persian thorn began to prick." The thorn was the numerous German population in Persia, centred in Teheran, and well organised as a spearhead for intrigue and action. The security of Persia had now assumed extra significance to Britain. Not only were the oil supplies of prime importance, but the country offered a desirable alternative route to the Arctic passage for material aid to Russia. The elimination of German influence became imperative, but the response of the Persian Government to a request for the expulsion of Axis nationals was unsatisfactory. Intelligence on the spot indicated that the Persians were augmenting their defences along the Shatt-el-Arab and the island of Abadan.

On the 18th June operational control of British forces in the Persian Gulf, which from early in May had rested with Middle East Command, passed back to India Command; and on the 17th July Wavell (who had assumed the appointment of Commander-in-Chief, India, six days earlier) telegraphed to the War Office:

It is essential to the defence of India that Germans should be cleared out of Iran [Persia] now. Failure to do so will lead to a repetition of events which in Iraq were only just countered in time. It is essential we should join hands with Russia through Iran, and if the present Government is not willing to facilitate this it must be made to give way to one which will. . . .

This view was already held by the British Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff, and on the 23rd July Cosmo Graham, at a conference in Basra, was told that pressure was to be brought on Persia to expel the Germans, and that "the strongest force available was to be made ready to occupy Abadan and Khorramshahr by the 29th July and thereafter to be kept at immediate notice". On the 13th August terms were agreed upon between Britain and Russia for respective notes to Persia, these to represent "the final word". They met with an unsatisfactory response, and entry into Persia by British forces from the south and Russian from the north was fixed for the 25th August.

Naval forces available for the intended operations at the head of the Gulf (Code name COUNTENANCE) were not large, and consisted of three sloops, H.M. Ships *Shoreham*, and *Falmouth*, and H.M.A.S. *Yarra*; the gunboat *Cockchafer*; the corvette *Snapdragon*;⁹ two armed yachts, H.M.S.

⁹ HMS *Snapdragon*, corvette (1940), 955 tons, one 4-in gun, 17 kts; sunk by aircraft in Central Mediterranean, 19 Dec 1942.

Seabelle and H.M.I.S. *Lawrence*;¹ the trawler *Arthur Cavanagh*;² two armed river steamers and some tugs, motor-boats, and dhows. Cosmo Graham was placed in command of the naval operations, and in response to his request for additional forces the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies (Vice-Admiral Arbuthnot³) offered him the Australian-manned H.M.S. *Kanimbla*, "which I gladly accepted".⁴

Surprise was essential for the speedy success of the undertaking, and the distribution of naval objectives necessitated the use of the available ships in three separate but simultaneous operations: at the Persian naval base of Khorramshahr; at the port and refinery of Abadan; and at the port of Bandar Shapur, southern terminus of the 872-mile Trans-Persian railway from the Caspian Sea.

The left bank of the Shatt-el-Arab from its mouth to the junction with the Karun River, a distance of forty miles, is the western side of Abadan Island. The northern end of this island is some two miles wide, and on it the Persian naval base of Khorramshahr faces the town of that name across the narrow Hafar Channel of the Karun River. In 1941 the base consisted of 600 yards frontage on the south bank of Hafar Channel, where there were five "T" jetties for small vessels. There was also 100 yards of frontage on the Shatt-el-Arab, with a boat pier and steps. Barracks and other buildings were on shore, among palm groves. Eleven miles downstream from the Karun River junction, and round an abrupt bend in the river, the refinery and town of Abadan and the adjacent Bawarda, with numerous berths for large ships, stretched for some three miles along the island bank of the Shatt-el-Arab.

The eastern side of Abadan Island is bounded by a narrow river, Khor Bahmanshir, which runs from the Karun River and discharges into the Gulf eight miles east of the Shatt-el-Arab. East again some thirteen miles is the western side of Khor Musa, a wide opening which extends northwards into flat, low-lying, sparsely vegetated land to a distance of some forty miles due east of Khorramshahr and then turns eastward. Along this eastern stretch, forty-seven miles due east of Khorramshahr, is Bandar Shapur.

The tasks at these three points were to capture the naval base at Khorramshahr and neutralise Persian forces there; to occupy Abadan without damage to the refinery and oil installations; and to capture Axis merchant ships at Bandar Shapur. At Khorramshahr three of the five "T" jetties were occupied—in order from the Shatt-el-Arab—by the Persian sloop *Babr*, the naval school ship *Ivy*, and two gunboats. It was believed that there were about 1,000 men at the base, which was under the com-

¹ HMIS *Lawrence*, sloop (1919), 1,210 tons, two 4-in guns, 15 kts.

² HMS *Arthur Cavanagh*, trawler (1918), 277 tons.

³ Admiral Sir Geoffrey Arbuthnot, KCB, DSO; RN. C-in-C East Indies in succession to Leatham on 22 Apr 1941. B. 1885.

⁴ "*Kanimbla*, a 12,000 ton armed merchant cruiser, a ship which at first sight appeared most unsuitable as a reinforcement for work in narrow waters but which turned out to be probably the only ship in the navy which could have supplied what I required in the way of a great number of hands, vast administrative endurance and spacious accommodation." Cosmo Graham, "Report on Operation 'Countenance'", 26 Sep 1941.

mand of Admiral Bayendor. At Abadan, where the contingency to be avoided was fire in the oil refinery and installations, was the Persian sloop *Palang*.⁵ At Bandar Shapur were the Persian gunboats *Karkas* and *Chahbaaz*;⁶ a floating dock; two American merchant ships, *Puerto Rican* (6,076 tons) and *Anniston City* (5,687 tons) alongside the jetty, and, anchored in the stream, eight enemy merchant vessels, the German *Hohenfels*, *Marienfels*, *Sturmfels*, *Weissenfels*, and *Wildenfels* (of 6,000-8,000 tons); the Italian merchant ship *Caboto* (5,225 tons) and tankers *Bronte* (8,238 tons) and *Barbara* (3,065 tons). The task was to neutralise the gunboats and capture the floating dock and enemy merchant vessels before they could be scuttled.

On the bank of the Shatt-el-Arab both above and below the Karun River were a number of Persian strong-posts, with machine-guns and, in one instance on Abadan Island, field pieces. In considering the opposition likely to be encountered, Cosmo Graham based his view on experience in the Iraq campaign when "our light forces found themselves in more than one hazardous situation"; and he decided "that all action should be resolute and no account should be taken of doubtful morale among the Persians particularly as their equipment was known to be modern and efficient".

Kanimbla (Captain Adams⁷), which had been patrolling and escorting on the East Indies Station, arrived in the Persian Gulf on the 7th August. She anchored and remained some thirty miles south of the Shatt-el-Arab light vessel and, by the use of canvas screens, tried to disguise her identity as an armed merchant cruiser. On the 8th August Cosmo Graham (at Basra) wrote to Adams outlining the situation:

We are pressing the Persians to clear out the Germans. If they are recalcitrant we shall move by land, sea and air. The earliest date is 12th August. . . . We have got to get Abadan—the main objective. I have a few ships over—including you, which gives us a chance to capture Bandar Shapur and the shipping there. . . . You will be—must be—in charge of the Bandar Shapur party. . . .

That party was to consist of *Kanimbla*, *Cockchafer*, *Lawrence*, *Snapdragon*, *Arthur Cavanagh*, two dhows, two tugs, and a R.A.F. motor pinnace. The Abadan force was the armed yacht *Seabelle* (wearing Cosmo Graham's broad pendant), *Shoreham*, a minesweeper, two armed river steamers, five motor-boats, two dhows and a launch. The sloop *Falmouth* was in charge of the Khorramshahr force, with *Yarra*, H.M. Kenya Launch *Baleeka*, and the armed river tug *Souriya*.⁸

⁵ *Babr* and *Palang*, Persian sloops (1932), 950 tons, three 4-in guns, 15 kts; sunk 25 Aug 1941.

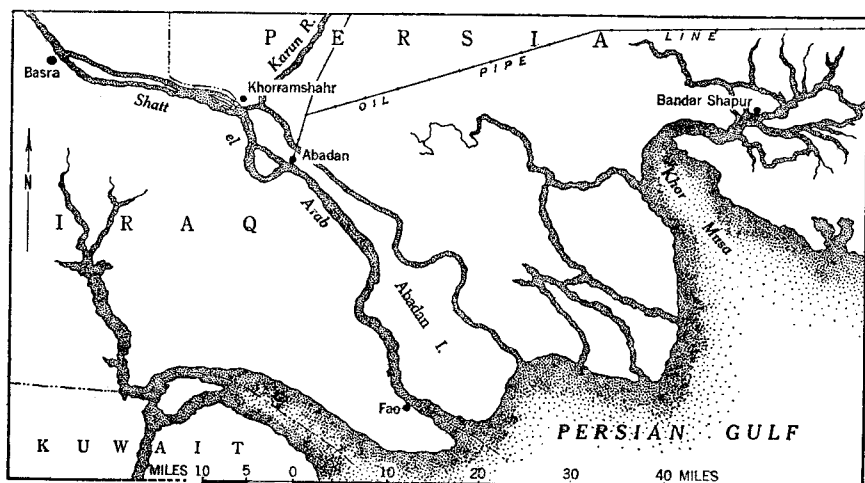
⁶ *Karkas* and *Chahbaaz*, Persian gunboats (1931), 331 tons, two 3-in guns, 15.5 kts.

⁷ Rear-Adm W. L. G. Adams, CB, OBE; RN. HMAS *Canberra* 1940; comd HMAS *Kanimbla* 1941-43, HMS *Wasp* and CF Base, Dover, 1943-44; Director Coastal Forces Material Dept 1944-45. B. 20 Apr 1901. (He relieved Capt Getting in command of *Kanimbla* on 25 Mar 1941. Getting returned to Australia to take up the appointment of Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff.)

⁸ "The naval force comprised such vessels as I was able to collect. They included ships and launches manned by the RN, the RAN, the RIN, together with their Reserves and Volunteer Reserves; the RCNVR and the Royal Kenya Naval Volunteer Reserve. Amongst the ratings were included some belonging to the South African Naval Service. New Zealand was also represented. The officer in command of the whole operation was a South African." Cosmo Graham, "Report on Operation 'Countenance'"; Most of those in *Kanimbla* and *Yarra* were reservists of the RAN. All *Kanimbla*'s officers with the exception of Adams and the Commander (Cdr G. C. F. Branson, RN, Emergency List) were reservists.

The earliest provisional date for the operation had been fixed at the 12th August, but there were many postponements and uncertainties. The delays however afforded opportunity for landing and boarding exercises, and for reconnaissance of the river passages in which *Kanimbla* ratings enjoyed themselves disguised as Arabs in one of the dhows. Finally, on the 23rd August, Cosmo Graham received the Chiefs of Staff telegram ordering that "D.1" for Operation COUNTENANCE be the 25th of the month. "So we passed from waiting to execution of my plans which were substantially unaltered from the original design."

On the 24th August the two forces for the Abadan and Khorramshahr operations were, with the exception of *Shoreham*, upstream at or near Basra, where they embarked Indian troops, a total of 1,250 in the Abadan force, while *Yarra* had one platoon and *Falmouth* two platoons and Company Headquarters of the 3/10th Baluch Regiment to deal



with Khorramshahr. *Shoreham* was at Fao, at the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab. Of the Bandar Shapur force, *Kanimbla*, with her smaller craft fast alongside, was at anchor in the Gulf south of the Shatt-el-Arab. She had on board two companies of the 3/10th Baluch Regiment, which she had embarked from *Lawrence* on the 11th August. Zero hour for all three operations was 4.10 a.m. on the 25th, and *Kanimbla's* force, having the greater distance to travel, was the first under way. The problem of its approach had caused much thought. There were many navigational dangers in Khor Musa which made it hazardous for a ship of *Kanimbla's* size to go up in the dark. On the other hand she would have been visible over the flat, low land, at a distance of fifteen miles or so in daylight. To keep the element of surprise Adams decided to risk the night passage. One of the dhows ("Dhow 8", manned from *Kanimbla*), and the R.A.F. motor pinnace, left the Gulf anchorage in the afternoon of the 24th, with hurri-

cane lamps to mark any unlighted buoys in the Khor Musa channel. The remainder of the force got under way at 8.15 p.m.

The Abadan force left the Basra area in sections around midnight on the 24th, and as soon as they were clear the Khorramshahr ships weighed and followed them down the river. The night was dark and still, ("every sound seemed like a thunder clap") with no moon, but the clear sky was star-studded. The ships stole quietly downstream, and though the darkened craft passed under the noses of Persian strong-posts on the left bank, and the naval base at Khorramshahr, they were unchallenged and unmolested.⁹ The Abadan force reached its objective precisely at 4.10 a.m. Fire was opened on machine-gun posts on shore, and within ten minutes the first troops were landed. The Persians put up considerable opposition, and by 5 a.m. fighting was general along the Abadan foreshore, which was subjected to heavy enemy machine-gun fire. Meanwhile *Shoreham* had come up river from Fao, and at 4.13 a.m. opened fire on the Persian sloop *Palang* at one of the jetties, and sank her. This act apparently caused the precipitate withdrawal across the Khor Bahmanshir of Persian forces on Abadan Island excepting those manning the water-front strong-posts, who "fought with tenacity and in many cases literally to the last man".¹ Fighting continued throughout the forenoon, with *Shoreham* moving up and down the river engaging such targets as offered, and it was noon before the foreshore was secured. By evening the whole refinery area was in British hands.

As the Khorramshahr force left Basra, *Falmouth* took the ground when turning. Harrington, in *Yarra*, in anticipation that the Persian ships at Khorramshahr might interfere with the landings at Abadan, decided to carry on to Khorramshahr independently, and arrived there at 4.8 a.m. On the way downstream he determined to sink the Persian sloop *Babr* on arrival. His reasons were threefold: to discourage further resistance; to remove a threat in his rear while he boarded the gunboats; and to disallow the opportunity of escape of the gunboats which his boarding of *Babr* would have presented. His arrival off Khorramshahr was apparently unobserved and, in order not to spoil the surprise of the Abadan force he lay concealed behind an anchored merchant ship until he heard gunfire downstream. He then cleared the line of sight, past the northern point of Karun River, illuminated *Babr* by searchlight, and opened fire. After ten salvos *Babr* was burning fiercely; the explosion of her after magazine blew a hole in her bottom, and she subsequently sank.

Yarra then moved up the Karun River, and with machine-gun and rifle fire silenced some rifle fire from the naval barracks and the two gunboats. Harrington then went alongside the gunboats, boarding parties went over, and the two ships and their crews were quickly secured. By 4.59 a.m. "all was quiet", but Harrington decided to await the arrival of *Falmouth*

⁹ "A reason which seems not improbable for this inaction was given by a Persian officer under interrogation: 'You had passed down river at night so often before.'" Cosmo Graham, "Report on Operation 'Countenance'".

¹ Cosmo Graham, Report.

before landing his troops. *Falmouth* entered the Karun River at 5.30 a.m. and secured alongside the school ship *Ivy*, and she and *Yarra* landed their troops. By 7.30 a.m. *Yarra* had transferred her prisoners to *Ivy*, and washed down the ship. The soldiers on the northern bank of the Karun were moving in quietly "and it became very hot". The Persian gunboats had Italian engineers who "were invited to place the engines of the gunboats in working order". They agreed without hesitation, and by evening both gunboats were entirely serviceable. On shore the main opposition was on the northern bank of the Karun in the vicinity of the wireless station, where Admiral Bayendor led a defence which collapsed when he was killed. "His death," wrote Cosmo Graham, "was regretted by all who knew him. He was intelligent, able, and faithful to Persia."² By nightfall the occupation of the Khorramshahr area was complete, and at 9.30 p.m. *Yarra* slipped and sailed down river and Gulf to Bandar Abbas.

Kanimbla, with the remainder of her force, had an uneventful passage up the Gulf from the anchorage. At 3.15 a.m. the force was well in the Khor Musa, and reached Bandar Shapur at the appointed time of 4.10 a.m. It was subsequently learned that the German ships were prepared for incendiarism and scuttling, but were under orders to await the alarm from *Hohenfels* before taking action. As *Kanimbla's* force approached Bandar Shapur *Hohenfels*, at 4.10 a.m., sounded her siren, and Adams arrived to find that "incendiarism was taking place on a greater scale than was anticipated, and *Weissenfels* was seen to be in a serious condition". This ship's chief engineer had anticipated the alarm from *Hohenfels*. She was burning furiously and so continued unapproachably all day. *Bronte* was badly on fire, and Adams took *Kanimbla* alongside her and secured, and salvage parties went on board. Meanwhile parties from the smaller ships boarded the other enemy merchant vessels (with the exception of *Weissenfels*) and proceed to fight fires and nullify scuttling action. These parties included 16 officers and 111 ratings from *Kanimbla's* ship's company. The Persian gunboats offered no resistance, and shortly arrived alongside *Kanimbla* under their own officers but wearing the White Ensign. While alongside *Bronte*, Adams started landing his troops by boat at the jetty a mile distant. They met little opposition ashore until nine-tenths of the town had been occupied. *Kanimbla* had little cause to use her main armament. She opened 6-inch fire with two guns on a railway train (which made good its escape), and fired with 3-inch high angle guns on aircraft (which were, it later transpired, British). When the fires in *Bronte* were under control shortly after noon, *Kanimbla* went alongside the jetty (where the two American merchant ships cooperated most willingly by shifting ship as needed and taking *Kanimbla's* lines) and landed the rest of the troops and stores. By 5 p.m. on the 25th the situation ashore at Bandar Shapur was calm, the principal persons were in custody, and arrangements were in hand for supplying water, and food from *Kanimbla*, for the local population, normally supplied by train. Of the enemy merchant ships, all

² Admiral Bayendor was buried in the Khorramshahr naval base which, with its capture, became HMS *Euphrates*, depot for the Royal Navy in the Gulf throughout the war.

except *Weissenfels* (which subsequently sank in deep water) were saved, and sailed or towed with prize crews to Indian ports. *Kanimbla* carried out a major salvage feat on *Hohenfels*.

There was one more enemy merchant ship saved in Persian waters, the Italian *Hilda* (4,901 tons), which *Yarra* was sent to secure at Bandar Abbas, on the northern shore of the Strait of Hormuz. *Yarra* arrived from Khorramshahr off Bandar Abbas just before 8 p.m. on the 27th August, and found *Hilda* anchored off the town, abandoned and badly on fire. The flames and heat were too great to do anything that night, but at 9 p.m. on the 28th Harrington took *Yarra* alongside the Italian, whose fires were now glowing and smoking, and by midnight had them sufficiently under control to start towing the damaged ship alongside. By the forenoon of the 29th Harrington was able to tell Cosmo Graham that he would have *Hilda* in tow astern by noon, with all fires extinguished and most leaks stopped. In reply he was told to tow towards Karachi, which he did at speeds gradually decreasing, owing to head winds, from four-and-a-half to two-and-a-half knots. In the afternoon of the 2nd September Harrington took his tow into Chahbar Bay, a few miles west of the Persia-India boundary, and there anchored her to await the arrival of a salvage tug from Karachi. The tug, the *Sydney Thubron* (439 tons), arrived on the 5th September, and on the 7th *Yarra* sailed for Kuwait, carrying with her a kitten and "an animal of unattractive appearance and surly disposition", subsequently identified as a Sind Gazelle, which she had rescued from the burning *Hilda*. That ship, in the tow of *Sydney Thubron*, sailed from Chahbar Bay for Karachi on the 8th September.

From its start on the 25th August, the campaign in Persia moved to a swift conclusion. On the 27th August the Persian Government resigned, and next day their successors ordered resistance to cease. Joint British-Russian proposals were accepted on the 2nd September, but attempts by the Shah to circumvent this led to his abdication in favour of his son on the 16th September. The following day British and Russian forces entered Teheran, where they remained until the 8th October, by which time communications through the country were secured. It was as a highway to Russia that the Persian Gulf was to become familiar to many members of the R.A.N. in the war years ahead.

CHAPTER 11

MEDITERRANEAN TO END OF 1941

WRITING after the war of the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean consequent on the loss of Crete, Admiral Cunningham said:

The immediate repercussions were threefold. The supply and hence the safety of Malta were jeopardized; attacks on the Libyan convoys were made very hazardous; and the route through the Mediterranean was virtually closed. The answer seemed clear. We had lost the northern flank and were unlikely to regain it. Therefore we must try and get the southern flank. If the army could reach, say, Derna, a good deal would have been done to ease the situation.¹

The British key points on this southern flank were Malta and Tobruk, each of which contributed to the enemy's difficulties in maintaining his communications in North Africa, while the nourishment of each imposed heavy burdens on the Mediterranean Fleet.

Events were to show that British success or otherwise in dealing with the Axis sea supply line to North Africa varied in almost direct proportion to the naval and air strength that could be based on Malta. As was told in Chapter 7 it was possible to base surface forces there for a few weeks during April and May 1941; but these were withdrawn in May to reinforce the fleet in the struggle for Crete, and thereafter surface forces were not again based on Malta until October 1941. Attacks on enemy convoys had to be left to submarines and aircraft, and for a time Malta had to rely for supplies, including petrol, on two minelaying submarines.

On the African coast the supply of Tobruk was largely maintained by a shuttle service of destroyers from Alexandria and Mersa Matruh. It was instituted in May 1941, and for a considerable time was carried on by ships of the 10th Flotilla, becoming the main occupation of the old Australian destroyers for the remainder of their stay in the Mediterranean.

Voyager and *Waterhen* made an initial run on the 5th and 6th May, and *Vendetta* followed them on the 8th. The three ships were then, however, caught up in the Crete operations, which employed *Voyager* for the rest of the month and *Waterhen* and *Vendetta* until the 19th and 26th respectively. *Vampire* entered the service on the 15th May, when she left Alexandria with troops and stores for Tobruk and returned with 180 wounded. She made only two runs. On her return to Alexandria from her second, on the 21st May, her defects had become so numerous and vibration at speeds over 18 knots so excessive that she was withdrawn from the station for a thorough refit. First of the original Australian destroyers to leave the Mediterranean, she sailed from Alexandria on the 28th May for Singapore, where she arrived on the 19th June.

Waterhen began her unbroken series of runs on the 20th May; *Vendetta* on the 29th; *Voyager* on the 5th June and *Stuart* on the 16th. The ships

¹ Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 395.

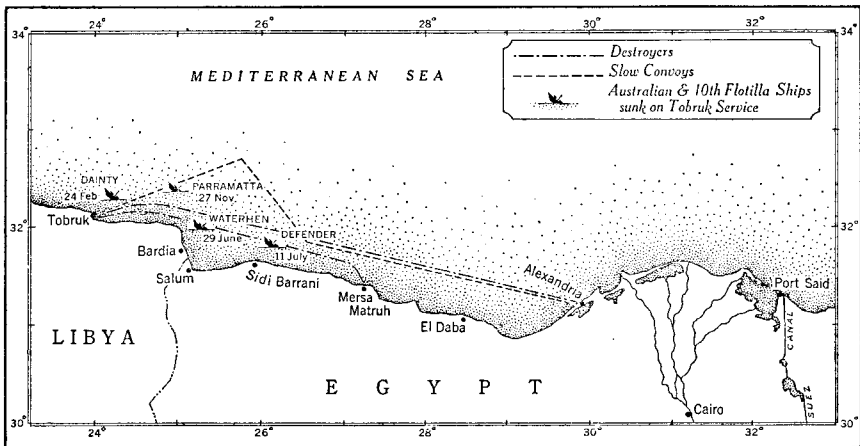
of the "Tobruk Ferry Service" ran to a regular routine. *Stuart's* diarist briefly described it:

The following fits any or all of the runs. Morning of first day, sailed from Alexandria for Tobruk with troops, ammunition and stores. Air attacks at so and so and so and so during the day. Arrived Tobruk in dark, unloaded and took on so many wounded, 200 troops, and ammunition empties, and proceeded to Mersa Matruh. Air raid at Matruh. Next day embarked ammunition and stores and sailed for Tobruk. Air attacks. Arrived Tobruk, unloaded, embarked wounded, troops and ammunition empties. Tobruk continuously raided throughout stay. (At times also shelled at random by the enemy.) Air attacks on passage. Arrive Alexandria. And then, 36 hours later, the same thing all over again.

It was a wearing, wearying routine, with little rest and few occasions when sleep was unbroken by the call of battle.² There were, however, brief hours of relaxation, as when, in Mersa Matruh (a peacetime holiday bathing resort)

we were berthed only a few feet from the sandy foreshore, and the water was crystal clear. We could see some soldiers bathing from the white sandy beach a few hundred yards astern of us. The June day was terrifically hot, and very soon most of the ships' companies were bathing. . . . The earlier days of our Inshore Squadron duty came back to us when we found that the S.N.O. Inshore Squadron [Captain Poland] was to be our passenger this trip. How different these days were to that cold and wind-swept January. Today the sea was as calm as it could be, the heat was shimmering off the burning sandy beaches, and it was a relief to slip from the pontoon early in the afternoon to the cooler atmosphere off shore, when, with *Voyager*, we set our course for Tobruk.³

In all, the Australian destroyers made a total of 139 runs in and out of Tobruk during the period of the regular "Ferry". *Vendetta* holds the record with 39 individual passages: into Tobruk, 11 from Alexandria and



9 from Mersa Matruh; and from Tobruk, 8 to Alexandria and 11 to Mersa Matruh. From the end of May until the first week in August

² Waller, when he returned to Australia in August 1941, listed lack of sleep as the greatest trial in the "Tobruk Ferry Service".

³ Clifford, *The Leader of the Cocks*, pp. 193, 196.

she was without intermission on the Tobruk shuttle service, and carried 1,532 troops to Tobruk; brought 2,951 away, including wounded and prisoners of war; and transported 616 tons of supplies into the port.⁴

The other Australian destroyers were similarly employed for varying periods: *Stuart* from mid-June until the end of July; *Voyager* from the beginning of June until the middle of July; and *Waterhen* from the last ten days of May until the end of June. Later, when all the Mediterranean Fleet destroyers were given turns on the shuttle service, *Nizam* served on it for most of August, and *Napier* for a short period in September.

There were other, and even less attractive, methods of supplying Tobruk by sea; by small schooners which crept along the coast; by "A" lighters; and by slow, escorted convoys. For these convoys there was no night dash through the danger area. Their passage from Alexandria to Tobruk took some forty-eight hours with, on the round voyage, at least two full days of daylight within enemy bombing range, and lacking air cover. Among the Australian ships *Parramatta* was engaged on this work and, later in the year, *Yarra*.

Parramatta reached Alexandria on the 3rd June from the East Indies Station. On the way she gleaned information of the ordeal through which the Mediterranean Fleet had passed. *Kipling* and *Vampire*, met at Suez, gave "startling intelligence of actions in the Mediterranean and of damage sustained by the fleet". The damaged *Barham* was passed in the Canal, and *Dido* with "a great crater in her near the bridge. Her crew however went past singing lustily". Walker was concerned about dive bombing, of which his crew knew nothing "except the evidence of its effects. It was some days before we regained a balanced perspective and I am glad we were not dive-bombed until this was attained." There was little time for its attainment.

Parramatta spent a few days in Alexandria, then suffering almost nightly air raids. On the 15th June she sailed to Mersa Matruh in connection with Operation BATTLEAXE, by which it was hoped to "get the southern flank".⁵ After the failure of that operation she returned, on the 19th June, to Alexandria. On that day, with the R.N. sloops *Flamingo* and *Auckland*, she was transferred to the operational control of the Rear-Admiral, Alexandria, for escort duties on the Tobruk supply service.

On Sunday evening, 22nd June, in company with *Auckland* (Senior Officer), she left Alexandria escorting the small petrol carrier *Pass of Balmaha* (758 tons) to Tobruk. The program was to hug the coast for the first day to get fighter protection; to gain a good offing the following night; and to approach Tobruk on a south-westerly course in the afternoon of the following day. *Pass of Balmaha* would make the last forty

⁴ Rhoades, *Vendetta's* commanding officer at the time, later wrote that *Vendetta* made "twenty-four night runs into Tobruk harbour", a record "never beaten, as far as is known, by any other destroyer". He was possibly including a number of runs she made into the port in April 1941, before the regular shuttle service was instituted. See *H.M.A.S. Mark III* (1944), p. 72.

⁵ Operation BATTLEAXE was designed to drive the enemy west of Tobruk and re-establish land communication with that fortress, and was launched by General Wavell on the 15th June. Unexpected enemy mechanised strength was met, and the operation failed, the British falling back to near their original positions after a three days' battle.

miles into Tobruk alone in darkness, and the sloops would remain at sea to pick her up later and escort her back to Alexandria.

For the first thirty-six hours all went well. During the morning of the second day, the 24th June, there were some isolated, fruitless air attacks; but soon after 5.30 p.m. three formations, each of sixteen dive bombers, attacked. Two formations concentrated on *Auckland*, and the third on *Parramatta*. At 5.50 p.m. *Auckland* was hit. She emerged from a cloud of smoke out of control and heading for *Parramatta*, who had to turn to avoid her. "As she passed," recorded Walker, "I saw that she was a wreck abaft the mainmast, with no stern visible. She was on fire aft, but her forward guns were firing." After about fifteen minutes there was a brief respite. *Auckland*, stopped, abandoned ship, and Walker closed her and dropped whalers and skiffs, life-belts and floats, to rescue the survivors in the water. At the same time he reported the attack by wireless, and *Waterhen* and *Vendetta*, who had left Mersa Matruh at 1.30 p.m. for Tobruk, at once made for the scene.

Further air attacks developed at 6.28 p.m. *Parramatta* was caught at a disadvantage, as *Auckland's* survivors were all around her in the water. They were machine-gunned by the attacking aircraft. At this time *Auckland* blew up with an explosion that lifted her "slowly and steadily about six or seven feet into the air. Her back broke with a pronounced fold down the starboard side" and she rolled over and sank. *Parramatta* managed to get clear and moved away some three miles as so slowly the westerling sun dropped towards the horizon and more dive-bombing formations gathered for the attack. "There seemed always one formation falling about like leaves in the zenith and then diving in succession, one moving forward into position, and one splitting up and coming in at 45°." For two hours the ordeal continued, the last attack ceasing when "the sun's lower limb touched the horizon at 8.25 p.m.", and sheltering darkness gathered as *Waterhen* and *Vendetta* reached the scene. *Parramatta* picked up *Auckland's* 164 survivors (two of whom died on board) while the destroyers circled her, and she then proceeded to Alexandria, where she arrived at 7.45 p.m. on the 25th. *Pass of Balmaha*, damaged in the bunkers, was taken in tow by *Waterhen* to Tobruk, with *Vendetta* giving anti-submarine protection. *Vendetta* entered Tobruk to disembark, and on leaving met *Waterhen* and *Pass of Balmaha* in the swept channel in the early hours of the 25th. *Waterhen* here handed her charge over to a tug, and the destroyers proceeded in company to Alexandria, where they arrived that evening.

In a careful estimate reached from the evidence of all available witnesses, Walker concluded that the air attacks were made by forty-eight dive bombers, and some five or ten high-level bombers, apparently protected by a number of fighters "which remained at a great height looking like flies (estimates vary up to thirty)". Three of the bombers were shot down, and Walker reported of his crew: "All weapons were constantly firing and the men fought excellently, especially as this was, for the most part, their first experience of a close action." The First Sea Lord, in a

personal signal to Cunningham a day or so later remarked of this episode that "the ship handling and shooting of H.M.A.S. *Parramatta* must have been very good".

As stated above, *Waterhen* did not enter Tobruk on the night of the 24th-25th June, nor was she again to do so. On the 28th of the month, this time in company with her 10th Flotilla companion *Defender*, she left Alexandria on her last run. At 7.45 p.m. on the 29th, when off Salum, the two ships were attacked by dive bombers and *Waterhen* was crippled and holed by very close misses, fortunately without casualties. *Defender* went alongside and took off the troops and ship's company. With the fall of night she returned to the abandoned *Waterhen* (while closing her she fired on a surfaced submarine which crash-dived and apparently escaped) and took the Australian destroyer in tow. It was not possible to save her, however. When it was clear that she was sinking, the working party was taken off, and at 1.50 a.m. on the 30th *Waterhen*, the old "Chook" as she was called by her crew in the homely vernacular, rolled over and sank. She was the first ship of the Royal Australian Navy to be lost through enemy action, and fourth of the 10th Destroyer Flotilla so to go. Admiral Cunningham wrote her epitaph when he signalled to Lieut-Commander Swain, "late of H.M.A.S. *Waterhen*": "His Majesty's Australian Ship *Waterhen* having been sunk by enemy action it is my direction that she is to be regarded as having been formally paid off on Monday the 30th day of June, 1941."⁶

Defender survived *Waterhen* by only a few days. Shortly after 1 a.m. on the 11th July she and *Vendetta* left Tobruk for Alexandria. It was a night of bright moonlight, when the creaming wakes of the destroyers were tell-tale marks for bombers themselves only revealed by the noise from the engines or the explosion of their bombs. At 5.18 a.m. those in *Vendetta* saw a flash and burst of smoke from *Defender*. She had been near-missed by a heavy bomb which exploded under and flooded the engine room, and broke the ship's back. *Vendetta* went alongside (picking up from the water as she did so one of *Defender's* crew blown overboard by the explosion), embarked 275 troops and equipment, and took the crippled ship in tow. *Defender* was settling, however, and finally *Vendetta* took off her crew, speeded her end with a torpedo, and at 11.15 a.m. on the 11th July she sank seven miles north of Sidi Barrani, not far from where *Waterhen* had gone twelve days earlier.

The supply of Tobruk by sea was, as Cunningham later remarked,

⁶ The loss of *Waterhen* raised in the Admiralty the question of financial adjustment between a Dominion and UK Government when a vessel of war was lost in the war. The conditions of loan of *Waterhen* and the other three destroyers lent with her were: "No provision was made in the conditions of loan to cover the possibility of the vessels being lost while on loan. It was, however, laid down that the Commonwealth Government would be responsible for returning the vessels to England on the termination of their service or, if the vessels were scrapped while still on loan, for paying to HM Government their scrap value." In a letter to the British Treasury, the Admiralty wrote: "It might thus be held that the date on which the vessel was due for scrapping having long passed, the Commonwealth Government should now make a payment in respect of *Waterhen* equal to her scrap value. While, however, such a claim for payment might reasonably have been against the Commonwealth Government had *Waterhen* been lost in time of peace, My Lords do not think it appropriate to make any claim in view of the actual circumstances of the vessel's loss." With this view the Treasury agreed, and no claim was made.

a costly undertaking. In addition to the strain imposed by enemy action, that of hard running was telling on the old Australian ships which "were literally dropping to bits after much hard work. Indeed, patched up again and again and all in need of extensive refits, they were only kept running by the sheer grit and determination of the officers and men of their engineering departments."⁷

Hitherto the Tobruk work had been done by the ships of the 10th Flotilla, but now (July) all destroyers were put on in turn, and the fast minelayers *Abdiel* and *Latona*⁸ were also used. One by one the old Australian ships dropped out, withdrawn for extensive refits. *Voyager*, who left Tobruk on her last run on the 13th July and finished the passage to Alexandria on one engine, sailed from the Egyptian port for home on the 24th July. First of the flotilla to get back to Australia, she reached Darwin on the 12th September 1941, and Sydney on the 25th.

Stuart made her final Tobruk run on 25th-26th July. Earlier in the month, in company with *Decoy*, she came safely through a crowded hour when she recorded, on the 9th, "heavy moonlight and dawn attacks by enemy bombers at 0508, 0509, 0512, 0520, 0521, 0535, 0538, 0607, 0616". On the 22nd August, with her port engine out of commission, she sailed from Alexandria for Australia. Waller had by then left her to go on ahead by air, and the old ship was under the command of Lieut-Commander Robison. Steaming on the starboard engine only, she reached Fremantle on the 16th September, and Williamstown on the 27th September 1941.

The day *Stuart* left Alexandria, "the C-in-C. having come alongside unexpectedly with the 'Affirmative' showing", Admiral Cunningham went inboard and asked that the lower deck be cleared. This was done, and he told the ship's company: "Well, you're off home! And I didn't think I could allow your ship to leave without coming on board to say a few words of goodbye to you." He spoke from the heart, of *Stuart* and the other Australian destroyers; of Waller (who would, as he later wrote, "always remain in my mind as one of the very finest types of Australian naval officer. Full of good cheer, with a great sense of humour, undefeated and always burning to get at the enemy . . . greatly loved and admired by everyone.") He told them: "I am grateful to you for what you have done and for the example you undoubtedly set." He had "a special word for the Black Squad. They have done magnificently to keep these ships going. . . . The whole Fleet will part with you with great regret. We are very proud to have had you with us, and I hope you are proud to have been in the Mediterranean Fleet. I hope you will have a very happy home coming, and that the folks 'down under' will give you the welcome you deserve. Goodbye to you all." *Stuart's* diarist recorded that "as the barge passed astern of *Stuart* on its way back to Admiralty House, the

⁷ Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 403.

⁸ HMS *Latona*, minelayer (1940), 2,650 tons, six 4-in guns, 39.75 kts; sunk 20 Nov 1941.

C.-in-C. stood up and waved his cap to *Stuart* and her assembled ship's company".⁹

Stuart's departure marked the end of the old 10th Destroyer Flotilla. Of the two sole remaining ships, *Vendetta* was transferred to the 7th Flotilla, *Decoy* to the 2nd. *Vendetta* made her final Tobruk run on 2nd-3rd August. Thereafter she was employed on convoy work, mainly between Syria, Egypt, and Cyprus. She sailed from Alexandria on the 20th October for Singapore, where she arrived on the 8th December 1941. Rhoades, who had been in command since March 1940, left *Vendetta* at the end of August 1941, and the ship completed her Mediterranean service and made the passage out to Singapore under the command of Lieut-Commander Stephenson.¹

II

Meanwhile, apart from the withdrawal of the old destroyers, there were other changes in Australian naval representation in the Mediterranean. On the 4th June 1941 the Australian War Cabinet considered a proposal by Admiral Colvin that if the permanent repairs needed in *Perth* could be effected in Australia, she should return from the Mediterranean but be replaced there by *Hobart* "in view of the losses of cruisers sustained by the Royal Navy". This was agreed to. The offer of *Hobart* was "most gratefully" accepted by the Admiralty, and she left Sydney on the 20th June and reached Aden on the 9th July. Captain Howden found that conditions in the Red Sea presented a most peaceful contrast to those of 1940. Intelligence received at Aden (where Rear-Admiral Hallifax² was now established as Senior Naval Officer, Red Sea³) was that "all surface vessels could be considered friendly; no submarines would be encountered; and attack by aircraft could be considered most remote". He was quickly to find this last an over-optimistic appreciation. During July the Germans began to pay attention to the Red Sea entrance to the Mediterranean. They made heavy air attacks on Port Said, Ismailia, Port Tewfik, and Suez, and mined the Canal on several occasions. These attacks were continued throughout August; and in September the enemy penetrated some way down the Red Sea, attacking convoys with long-range aircraft.

Hobart reached Suez on the 12th July, and entered the Canal in the

⁹ On 23rd August Admiral Cunningham sent the following signal to the Naval Board: "It is with great regret that we part with HMAS *Stuart* from the Mediterranean Station. Under the distinguished command of Captain Waller she has an unsurpassed record of gallant achievement. She has taken a leading part in all the principal operations of the Mediterranean Fleet and has never been called upon in vain for any difficult job. The work of her engine room department in keeping this old ship efficient and in good running order has been beyond all praise. The Mediterranean Fleet is poorer by the departure of this fine little ship and her gallant ship's company."

In addition to Admiral Cunningham, the Rear-Admiral (D) visited the ship to say goodbye before she sailed, and she received valedictory signals from V-A 1st Battle Squadron (Pridham-Wippell); R-A(D) (Glennie); CS7 (Rawlings); and *Queen Elizabeth*, *Valiant*, *Medway* and 1st Submarine Flotilla; and Captain(D)? (Arliss).

¹ Cdr C. J. Stephenson, OBE; RAN. HMAS *Yarra* 1939; comd HMAS's *Orara* 1940, *Vendetta* Sep-Nov 1941, 1942-43, *Napier* 1944, *Nepal* 1944-45. B. Norfolk I, 14 Mar 1910.

² Vice-Adm R. H. C. Hallifax, CB, CBE; RN. (HMS's *Queen Elizabeth* 1914-16, *Iron Duke* 1917-18.) Comd Home Fleet Destroyers 1939-41; FO Cdg Red Sea Force 1941-43 and Suez Canal Area 1942-43. B. 24 Jul 1885. Killed in air crash, 6 Nov 1943.

³ Rear-Adm Murray, who occupied what Walker called "the charmingly short-titled office of SNORS" from early 1940 to early 1941, relinquished it because of sickness. He was succeeded by Cmdre C. P. Clarke, RN, who was in turn succeeded by Rear-Adm Hallifax in June 1941.

evening of the 13th, but the presence of acoustic mines caused her return to Suez. Shortly after midnight on the 13th heavy raids by dive bombers developed on the port and anchored ships. At 3.13 a.m. on the 14th the large, crowded transport *Georgic* (27,759 tons) received a direct hit and was soon burning fiercely. She got under way in an endeavour to beach herself, and collided with *Glennearn*, which ship she damaged, set on fire, and dragged aground. *Hobart* had a busy night, with boats and medical parties away transferring *Georgic's* passengers and crew to the shore, among the passengers being Swain, lately *Waterhen's* commanding officer. That afternoon *Hobart* successfully refloated *Glennearn*, towed her clear, and turned her over to tugs which berthed her at Port Tewfik. *Georgic*, fast ashore, burned fiercely throughout the day and the following night.⁴ At 10 a.m. on the 15th *Hobart* sailed, and the following day entered the Mediterranean and joined the 7th Cruiser Squadron under Rawlings. *Perth* sailed from Alexandria on the 18th July for Australia. She reached Fremantle on the 6th August and Sydney on the 12th.

Another Australian ship entered the Mediterranean at this time, but did not then get east of Malta. Third of the new "N" Class destroyers, H.M.A.S. *Nestor* commissioned at Fairfield's yard on the Clyde on the 3rd February 1941 under Commander Stewart.⁵ The first five months of her commission she spent with the Home Fleet. On the 19th July (now under command of Commander Rosenthal⁶) she arrived at Gibraltar to take part in Operation SUBSTANCE.

By the middle of July 1941 the supply situation at Malta was becoming acute, and operation SUBSTANCE was designed to run a convoy of one personnel ship (*Leinster*, of 4,302 tons) and six military transports (*Melbourne Star*, *Sydney Star*, *City of Pretoria*, *Port Chalmers*, *Durham*, *Deucalion*⁷) to the island from the west. The operation was under the direction of Admiral Somerville with Force "H" reinforced by *Nelson*, and some cruisers, and destroyers including *Nestor*. Opportunity was taken under cover of the operation to run to the west from Malta six merchant ships and *Breconshire* (10,000 tons) which had been immobilised in Malta through inability to take them east in the face of enemy air power. The role of the Mediterranean Fleet was to create a diversion by sweeping westward from Alexandria to give the impression that SUBSTANCE was being run right through the Mediterranean.

SUBSTANCE and its escorting and covering groups (a number of which also carried troops, including *Nestor*, who embarked four officers and fifty-two other ranks at Gibraltar) started the eastward passage in the early hours of the 21st July. Soon after leaving Gibraltar in thick fog,

⁴ *Georgic* was later salvaged, and after the war entered the Australian trade as a Government chartered migrant ship.

⁵ Capt G. S. Stewart, RAN. (HMAS *Australia* 1920.) HMAS *Hobart* 1939-40; comd HMAS *Nestor* 1941, HMS *Porcupine* 1942, HMAS *Quiberon* 1943-44, HMAS *Napier*, as Capt(D)7 Flotilla 1945; NOIC New Guinea 1946. B. Colac, Vic, 20 Dec 1902.

⁶ On 14 May 1941 Stewart was succeeded in command of *Nestor* by Cdr C. B. Alers-Hankey, RN, the ship then being at Scapa Flow. Six days later Rosenthal (who relinquished command of *Westralia* at Colombo on 25 Sep 1940) assumed command of *Nestor* vice Alers-Hankey.

⁷ Of 12,806, 11,095, 8,047, 8,535, 10,893 and 7,516 tons respectively.

Leinster ran ashore on Carnero Point at the entrance to Algeciras Bay and had to be left behind. For the first two days *Nestor* was on the screen of Force "H" (*Renown* and *Ark Royal*). At 11.10 p.m. on the 22nd, when the force was about seventy miles N.N.W. from Cape Bougaroni on the African coast, Sub-Lieutenant Colclough,⁸ *Nestor's* anti-submarine officer, and second officer of the watch, detected hydrophone effects of torpedoes and sighted tracks crossing from starboard to port. He at once ordered "Hard a starboard" and an alarm report was made to *Renown*. Two torpedoes passed under *Nestor*, who for over an hour hunted and attacked the responsible submarine, though without definite result.⁹

In the early morning of the 23rd July Force "H" and the escorted convoy (which had hitherto been about thirty miles apart) joined company, and *Nestor* took station on the convoy screen under the command of Rear-Admiral Syfret,¹ Rear-Admiral Commanding, 18th Cruiser Squadron, in *Edinburgh*.² At 9.42 a.m. the fleet was attacked by torpedo and high-level bombers; the destroyer *Fearless* was crippled and had to be sunk, and the cruiser *Manchester* was badly damaged and returned to Gibraltar. Other attacks developed during the day. At 5.13 p.m. convoy and escort reached the entrance to the Sicilian Narrows and Force "H" parted company and withdrew westward to cover *Manchester* and the west-bound convoys from Malta. At 7.45 p.m. the SUBSTANCE convoy was attacked by high-level bombers and the destroyer *Firedrake*³ was damaged and returned to Gibraltar.

At 2.30 a.m. on the 24th July the convoy was due north of Pantellaria some eight miles distant. Shortly after, an attack by Italian motor torpedo boats developed, and persisted at intervals for about an hour. It was an affair of brief glimpses of the enemy vessels illuminated by searchlight; of gun flashes and bright streams of tracer bullets; of the evasion of torpedoes. Between six and twelve torpedo boats were present; one was sunk, one possibly sunk, and two others damaged. They succeeded in torpedoing, but not sinking, one of the ships of the convoy.

When the attack developed, *Nestor* was screening on the starboard quarter of the convoy. No enemy activity was observed in her vicinity, but "firing in considerable volume was heard and seen to port and ahead and astern of the convoy, a lot of tracer ammunition was being used and illumination being provided by searchlight". At about 2.55 a.m. *Nestor* saw one ship of the convoy dropping astern, and on investigation found

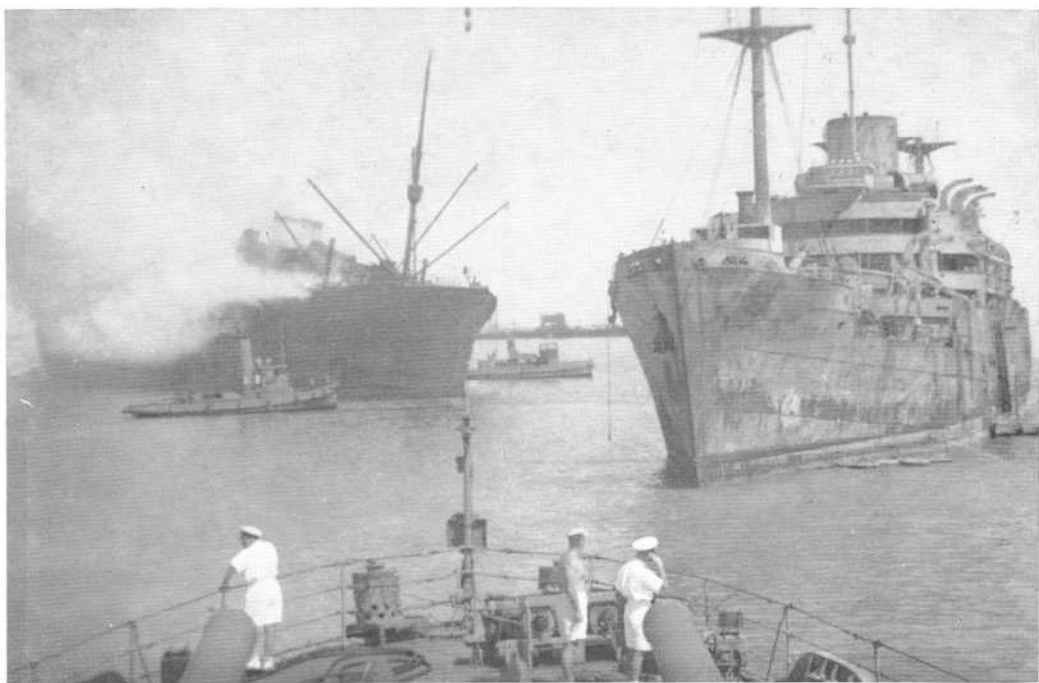
⁸ Lt-Cdr P. S. Colclough, DSC; RANVR. HMS *Lady Elsa* 1940-41, HMAS's *Nestor* 1941-42, *Norman* 1942-43, *Orara* 1944-45. Journalist; of Kew, Vic; b. Essendon, Vic, 10 Dec 1919.

⁹ In his report on the operation, Admiral Somerville wrote: "Subsequent Italian claims that a U-boat had sunk an unspecified ship suggests that *Nestor's* boat escaped and made a false claim based on hearing her torpedoes exploding at the end of their run." Writing of "outstanding points" in the operation, he also said of this submarine attack on the force: "The successful avoiding action taken by the heavy ships at 2315/22 was only rendered possible by the prompt action taken, and quick and accurate report made, by *Nestor*."

¹ Admiral Sir Neville Syfret, GCB, KBE; RN. Comd Force "H" 1942-43; Vice-Chief of Naval Staff 1943-45; C-in-C Home Fleet 1945-48. B. Capetown, S Africa, 20 Jun 1889.

² HMS *Edinburgh*, cruiser (1939), 10,000 tons, twelve 6-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 32.5 kts; sunk, after U-boat damage, in Barents Sea, 2 May 1942.

³ HMS *Firedrake*, destroyer (1935), 1,350 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk by U-boat in N Atlantic, 16 Dec 1942.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Georgic and Glenearn aground in Suez Bay, with H.M.A.S. Hobart approaching, 14th July 1941.



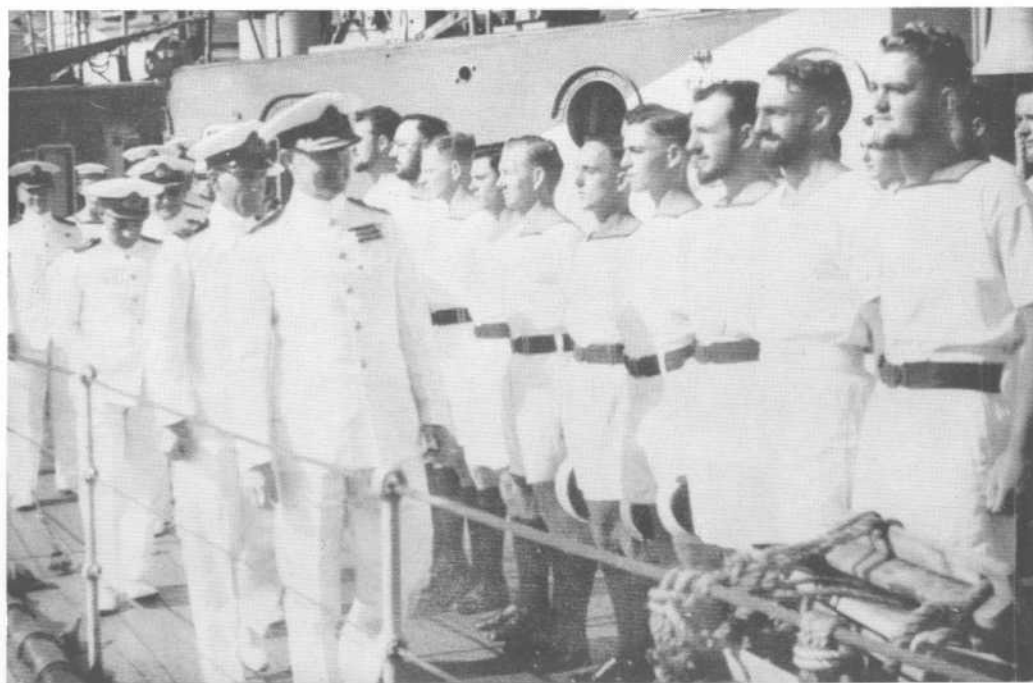
(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Crew of H.M.A.S. Hobart bathing in Bitter Lake, 15th July 1941.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Boat's Crew from H.M.A.S. *Perth*, in Alexandria Harbour.



(Yeoman N. O. Taylor, R.A.N.)

Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, followed by Lieut-Commander J. S. Mesley and Commander L. E. Tozer, inspecting H.M.A.S. *Hobart's* Communications Division.



Manning Anti-aircraft
Gun, H.M.A.S. *Perth*.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



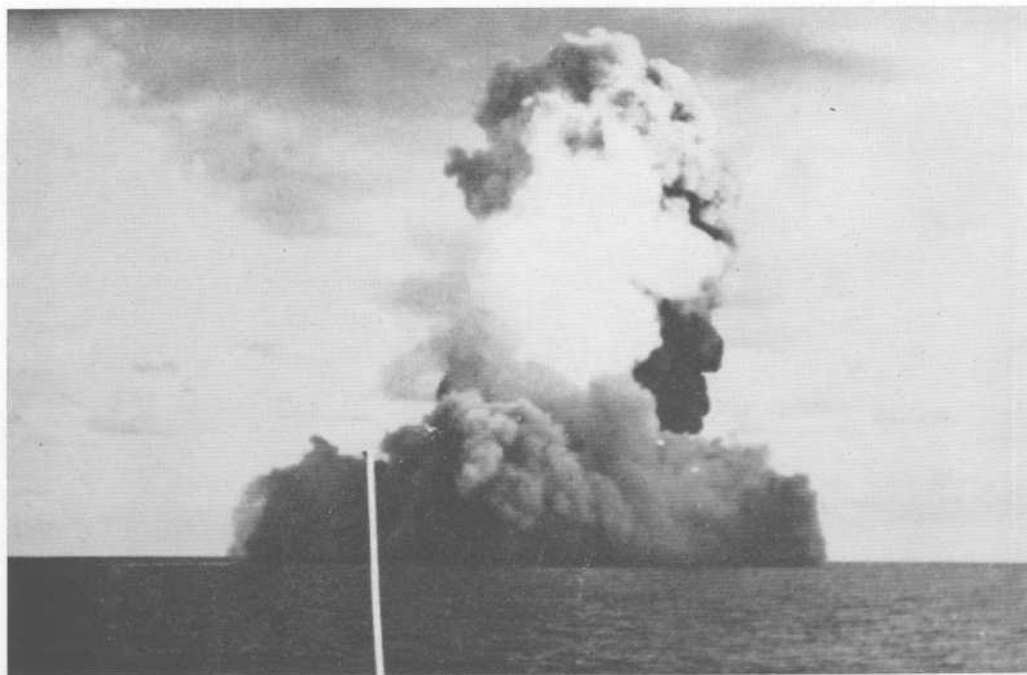
(R.A.N. Historical Section)



H.M.A.S. *Kanimbla*
alongside Italian Oiler
Bronte at Bandar Shapur,
25th August 1941.

H.M.S. *Barham* blowing
up, 25th November 1941.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Sydney Star steaming slowly on the opposite course to that of the convoy. Rosenthal closed her, found that her boats were being lowered, and learned that she had been torpedoed, had thirty feet of water in No. 3 hold, and was believed by her master to be sinking. The two ships were now only about four miles from Pantellaria, and Rosenthal decided to embark *Sydney Star's* troops. He took *Nestor* alongside the transport and secured at 3.15 a.m. This operation was helped by Leading Seaman Anderson⁴ and Able Seaman McLeod,⁵ who, on their own initiative, jumped down into one of *Sydney Star's* boats between the two ships, and got it clear at a time when "delay was unacceptable". While alongside, Rosenthal impressed on *Sydney Star's* master the importance of keeping that ship afloat and moving. Three enemy torpedo boats were sighted while the ships lay together, but the transfer of troops (467 officers and other ranks) and of twenty of *Sydney Star's* own complement⁶ was completed at 4.5 a.m. without interference, and at 4.10 a.m. *Nestor* cast off and proceeded, and Rosenthal had the satisfaction of seeing *Sydney Star* follow at 12 knots. At 8 a.m. the cruiser *Hermione*⁷ joined company, and the three ships successfully weathered a dive and high-level bombing attack at 10 a.m. and reached Malta safely at 2 p.m. It was a great day in Malta. Rear-Admiral Syfret in *Edinburgh*, with *Arethusa* and *Manxman*,⁸ steamed into Grand Harbour at 11.30 a.m. with ships' companies fallen in and bands playing; two-and-a-half hours later *Hermione*, *Nestor* and *Sydney Star* arrived; and at 3.30 p.m. the main convoy with its destroyer escort passed through the breakwaters.⁹

Meanwhile the west-bound convoys had sailed from Malta. Syfret and his cruisers and destroyers, including *Nestor*, followed them during the evening of the 24th. Between the 26th and 28th July all the west-bound forces and convoy groups reached Gibraltar safely, thus concluding a highly successful operation.

The following month another Australian ship made a brief visit to the Mediterranean. It will be remembered (Chapter 6) that *Bathurst*, first of the corvettes to be completed under the Australian Government's ship-building program, commissioned on the 6th December 1940 under Lieut-

⁴ PO R. J. Anderson, DSM, 20556, RAN. HMAS's *Moresby* 1939-40, *Nestor* 1941-42, *Napier* 1942, *Mildura* 1945. Of Subiaco, WA; b. Newington, Southwark, Eng, 21 Apr 1916.

⁵ AB J. S. McLeod, DSM, 22181, RAN. HMAS's *Perth* 1939-40, *Nestor* 1941-42, *Norman* 1942-44, *Goulburn* 1945-46. Of Kirribilli, NSW; b. Coolac, NSW, 24 Jul 1920.

⁶ *Nestor* then had on board her own complement of 231, her own military contingent of 56, and 487 from *Sydney Star*; a total of 774. As it was not possible to stow all troops below, top weight was considerable, and made itself felt when using full wheel during subsequent dive bombing attacks.

⁷ HMS *Hermione*, cruiser (1941), 5,450 tons, ten 5.25-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 33 kts; sunk in E Mediterranean, 16 Jun 1942.

⁸ HMS *Manxman*, minelayer (1941), 2,650 tons, six 4-in guns, 39.75 kts.

⁹ Somerville later wrote: "The safe arrival of *Sydney Star* reflects great credit on the Commanding Officer of *Nestor*, Commander A. S. Rosenthal, RAN, who showed judgment, initiative and good seamanship in handling a delicate situation so close to the enemy's coast and in the presence of enemy E-Boats. It was appropriate that the C.O. and most of his crew should be Australians."

Rosenthal reported of his officers and ship's company that they "behaved in a most satisfactory manner: they were keen and enthusiastic, and displayed a coolness in action which was the more creditable in view of the fact that not more than 15% of the total complement had been in action before".

Commander Bunyan. On the 25th January 1941, *Lismore*,¹ second of the class, commissioned under Lieut-Commander Crawford.² On the 21st February 1941 both ships sailed from Sydney for the East Indies Station. They reached Aden on the 22nd June and joined the Red Sea Force, and throughout July carried out survey sweeps of convoy anchorages in the Red Sea. On the 4th August *Bathurst* arrived at Alexandria to join the Mediterranean Fleet, but she was returned to the Red Sea on the recommendation of the Rear-Admiral, Destroyers, that she was unsuitable to operate in waters subject to daylight air attacks owing to insufficiency of armament.

From the end of August to mid-December she and *Lismore* were employed off the coast of French Somaliland on Tadjoura Gulf patrol. Here, on the 9th October, the Vichy French battery at Heron Plateau, Jibuti, fired two projectiles at *Bathurst*, both of which fell short. On the 16th December the two ships left for the Far East, and reached Colombo on the 29th of the month.

III

Not only the British faced supply difficulties in the Mediterranean; at this period the problem was an increasing one for the Axis powers. From April to December 1941 the average monthly gross tonnage of ships in the Axis Libyan convoys was 114,000 tons, with an average monthly loss of 21,000 tons sunk and 9,000 tons damaged. Of this the German liaison admiral at Rome (Admiral Weichold) wrote: "A loss of more than a quarter of the shipping space allotted to the African convoys meant a tremendous reduction in the shipping pool which in the long run could not fail to have serious consequences." The percentage of loss mounted steeply in the second half of the year, when increased air strength at Malta and the basing there of surface forces enabled sharper action against the convoys. From 17 per cent in July, the percentage figures of tonnage losses in the Axis convoys mounted in the succeeding months to 33, 39, 63, and a peak of 77 per cent in November, before dropping to 49 per cent in December. More German than Italian tonnage was lost in the convoys, and the situation led to considerable criticism in the German High Command of Italian conduct of the naval war. In July Hitler wrote to Mussolini a survey of military operations in Russia. Ciano wrote of it in his *Diary* at the time:

It is a broad politico-military survey, and finally—this is the real reason for the letter—asks to take over our air and navy commands. I don't know what they can do more or better than we can. Our Navy, especially, is giving excellent results in proportion to its opportunities and equipment.

Admiral Raeder, in a report to Hitler on the 26th August, pressed for increased use of Italian shipping, and pointed out that Italy had available

¹ HMAS *Lismore*, corvette (1940), 733 tons, one 4-in gun, 16 kts; transferred to Royal Netherlands Navy July 1946 and renamed *Batjam*.

² Capt S. H. Crawford, MBE, RD; RANR(S). HMAS *Hobart* 1940-41; comd HMAS's *Lismore* 1941-43, *Kanimbla* Jun-Aug 1944 and Aug 1945-Jan 1948. Of East Lindfield, NSW; b. London, 2 Apr 1905.

299 ships of various types totalling over a million tons. The report continued:

Previous experiences have shown that the Italians are very reluctant to use their shipping. Their intention to retain their shipping for commercial use during the period after the war when there is a shortage of shipping is obvious. Very strong pressure by the Government is necessary here. In order to carry out German transports most effectively it is necessary that the Italians surrender ships to the German Commanding Officer, Supply and Transports, for purely German use.³

On the 25th July Hitler first proposed sending German submarines to the Mediterranean, a proposal opposed by the Naval High Command. Raeder on this occasion replied that it was impossible to send submarines into the Mediterranean as this would handicap operations in the Atlantic. "Moreover, British submarines and aircraft are the forces used in the Mediterranean to attack transports, and these cannot be combatted with submarines." Hitler returned to the point later, and at a conference on the 22nd August (though Raeder reiterated that submarines were more urgently needed in the Atlantic) ordered that six submarines be transferred immediately to the Mediterranean. On the 17th September Raeder told Hitler that "two boats are en route, two will leave at the end of the week, and the remaining boats will be ready on 22nd and 27th September". On the 12th December Raeder reported on submarine dispositions with the aid of a map, and showed that "at present thirty-six submarines are in or en route to the Mediterranean", where it was proposed to station fifty.⁴ By October 1941 German submarines were in the Mediterranean in some force.

Meanwhile the British strengthened their position in the Central Mediterranean. Early in September Malta was well reinforced by fighter aircraft flown from carriers from the west; and at the end of the month operation SUBSTANCE was repeated successfully when a convoy of eight large merchant ships and *Breconshire* (Operation HALBERD) were run to the island from Gibraltar. One merchant ship, *Imperial Star* (10,733 tons), was torpedoed and sunk. The following month, with the added defensive fighter strength at Malta, and the reduction in enemy air attacks due to withdrawal of German air forces from Sicily for the Russian campaign, it again became possible to base surface forces on the island. Force "K", the cruisers *Aurora* and *Penelope*⁵ and destroyers *Lance* and *Lively*,⁶

³ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1941.

⁴ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1941.

Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 422, says: "Twenty German U-boats had entered the Mediterranean in October."

Weichold ("Essay", 1945) says: "Owing to unfavourable course of war German High Command, after long hesitation, was obliged, at the end of August 1941 to bring in naval forces to assist. In the first place German U-boats were ordered to the Mediterranean. The OKM [Naval High Command] viewed this allocation of German naval forces to the Mediterranean with displeasure, as they were completely concerned with the war against shipping in the Atlantic. Accordingly they at first succeeded in limiting number of U-boats to 21. Later the German High Command ordered increase to 36. However after a time C-in-C U-boats succeeded in obtaining a reduction to 25 U-boats."

⁵ HMS's *Aurora* and *Penelope*, cruisers (1936-37), 5,270 tons, six 6-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 32.25 kts; *Penelope* sunk by U-boat, Anzio area, 18 Feb 1944.

⁶ HMS's *Lance* and *Lively*, destroyers (1941), 1,920 tons, six 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 36.5 kts; *Lance* sunk by aircraft off Malta, 9 Apr 1942 (subsequently salvaged); *Lively* sunk by aircraft in E Mediterranean, 11 May 1942.

arrived there on the 21st October. In the early hours of the 9th November the force intercepted and destroyed an Axis convoy (the *51st Transport Squadron*) of seven merchant ships escorted by two 8-inch cruisers and ten destroyers. All seven ships of the convoy, totalling some 35,000 tons, were sunk. One destroyer, the *Fulmine*,⁷ was sunk in the action, and a second, the *Libeccio*,⁸ was sunk later in the day by the submarine *Upholder*.⁹ The two Italian cruisers, *Trieste* and *Trento*, with four of the destroyers were five miles astern of the convoy at the time of the attack. From the time that *Aurora's* force sighted the convoy till the first shot was fired seventeen minutes elapsed, during which the *Trieste's* force was steaming on the northward leg of their patrol and failed to come to the help of the convoy or be seen again by Force "K". Fire was opened at three minutes to 1 a.m. at a range of 5,700 yards, and the first three 6-inch salvos hit the *Fulmine*. The action then became general. At 1.25 a.m. *Aurora* led the force across the bows of the convoy, all ships of which were by then in flames.

On the 12th November further fighters were flown into Malta from the *Ark Royal*, but the next afternoon on her return passage west the carrier was torpedoed by the German submarine *U 81*.¹ She sank a few hours later when 25 miles east of Gibraltar.

In the Eastern Mediterranean complete changes of the garrisons at Tobruk and Cyprus made heavy demands on the fleet. The Commonwealth Government, concerned about the decline in physical resistance of its troops in Tobruk, requested their relief. This was opposed by the British Government and General Auchinleck² (who were then planning a major offensive in Libya), and by Cunningham (who was concerned at the strain which would be imposed on the navy), but the Australian Government was insistent; and the troops were brought out, and their reliefs put in, during August, September and October. The troops were carried in destroyers and the fast minelayers *Abdiel* and *Latona*, covered by the fleet. In all, some 19,400 troops were taken into Tobruk and some 18,900 brought out in these three operations, during the first of which the cruiser *Phoebe* was torpedoed but managed to reach Alexandria, while at the conclusion of the last *Latona*, hit by a bomb, blew up and sank. *Hobart*, *Napier* and *Nizam* took part in these operations. The two destroyers also participated in the Cyprus operation in November, when approximately 14,000 men of the garrison were removed from the island and replaced by an equal number of fresh troops from Palestine.

The Mediterranean had one more Australian newcomer before the end of the year. *Yarra* spent September and October in the Persian Gulf. In

⁷ *Fulmine*, Italian destroyer (1932), 1,220 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 38 kts; sunk in Central Mediterranean, 9 Nov 1941.

⁸ *Libeccio*, Italian destroyer (1934), 1,449 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 38 kts; sunk in Central Mediterranean, 9 Nov 1941.

⁹ HMS *Upholder*, submarine (1940), 540 tons, one 3-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 11.25 kts; lost off Tripoli, 14 Apr 1942.

¹ *U 81*, German submarine (1940), 740 tons, one 4.1-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 18.5 kts.

² Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, GCB, GCIE, CSI, DSO, OBE. C-in-C India 1941, 1943-47; C-in-C Middle East 1941-42. B. 21 Jun 1884.

November she joined the Mediterranean Station which, the previous month, had been extended to embrace the Red Sea, with the Senior Officer Red Sea Force (Hallifax) transferring his flag from Aden to Suez. On the 14th of the month *Yarra* reached Port Said where she met *Parramatta*, and the two ships arrived at Alexandria the next day to take up Tobruk convoy escort duties. *Parramatta* had spent August on the Port Said-Haifa-Cyprus convoy run, but early in September went to the Gulf of Suez. Most of that month was spent as anti-aircraft guard ship at Attaka, in Suez Bay, where, wrote Walker, "it was intended that my presence should inspire confidence in the crews of several American merchant ships" at the anchorage. October was spent in the Gulf of Suez on survey and other work which included a hazardous and finely executed rescue, from a reef in heavy weather, of the survivors of a bombed merchant ship.

Early in the morning of the 18th November 1941 the British Eighth Army launched the long-planned attack to drive the enemy out of Libya. That day *Yarra* (Senior Officer) and *Parramatta* left Alexandria escorting a slow convoy to Tobruk. The weather was wild, and apart from attempted enemy interference by aircraft and submarine, the voyage was made difficult by one ship of the convoy breaking down repeatedly and, at one stage, being taken in tow by *Parramatta*. The task was completed successfully, however, and the two sloops returned to Alexandria on the 23rd.

Meanwhile, fierce fighting by the Tobruk garrison, which had broken out on the 21st in an attempt to link up with the British troops advancing from the east, had produced an acute shortage of ammunition. To relieve this situation *Parramatta* was sailed from Alexandria on the 25th in company with the destroyer *Avon Vale*,³ escorting the fully laden ammunition ship *Hanne* (1,360 tons) to Tobruk. The merchant ships used on this convoy run were small, slow, and in many cases non-British. Escort-to-convoy communication had often to be made by megaphone, which meant the dangerous procedure of the two communicating ships slowing down right alongside one another.⁴ It happened on this occasion.

At midnight on the 26th November the convoy was just to the north-east of Tobruk. The night was dark with frequent showers. A heavy sea was running. *Hanne* was not clear as to her route into Tobruk, and *Parramatta* closed her to communicate by megaphone. At twenty-five minutes to one in the morning of the 27th the two ships lay close alongside one another, making about three knots.⁵ *Avon Vale* was some distance away.

³ HMS *Avon Vale*, destroyer (1940), 1,025 tons, six 4-in guns, 27 kts.

⁴ "It is," Harrington later wrote in one of *Yarra's* reports, "the only means of communicating after dark, as these small merchant vessels do not for the most part answer a dim signalling light and, having answered, require some considerable time to understand a short and simple signal. This is possibly in part due to their being unable to understand English."

⁵ Evidence of Signalman Stewart, a survivor, who was duty signalman at the time on *Parramatta's* bridge. (Chief Yeoman of Signals H. Stewart, 21663, RAN. HMAS's *Sydney* 1939-40, *Parramatta* 1940-41, *Napier* 1941, 1943-44, *Nestor* 1942, *Lismore* 1942-43, *Gawler* 1943, *Wollongong* 1944, *Manoora* 1945-46. Of Wellington, WA; b. Wellington, 12 Jan 1921.)

For nearly two hours the convoy, unknown to those in it, had been stalked by the German submarine *U 559*.⁶ Cruising off the Tobruk approaches her captain, at 10.45 p.m. on the 26th, sighted silhouettes to the north-east. By some trick of the light he saw "three merchant ships, with two destroyers stationed astern and what appears to be two fishing vessels ahead". The convoy ran into a rain squall, lit up by lightning. He followed it, and by midnight had manoeuvred into position for attack. Twelve minutes later, at a range of 2,000 metres, he fired a spread of three torpedoes at a "three thousand ton merchant ship behind which a smaller vessel was also visible". All three torpedoes missed.

His presence still undetected, the German continued to stalk. "I cannot wait because the convoy is just off the Tobruk approach route." At fourteen minutes to one on the 27th (his time was eleven minutes different from *Parramatta's*):

I fire a single torpedo at a range of 1,500 metres using the same estimations. The target is a destroyer with one funnel. Hit! Two explosions take place one after the other. The destroyer breaks up and sinks. Shortly afterwards there was another heavy explosion. Probably her depth charges. I make off towards the south-east. The fishing vessels and/or the destroyer are searching. They are sighted once more and then disappear into the rain. Depth charges are heard for a long time.⁷

The torpedo struck *Parramatta* amidships at twenty-five minutes to one, and there was an almost simultaneous explosion, probably the magazine, under the quarterdeck, so that survivors believed that two torpedoes had struck and exploded. The ship was instantly crippled, lighting failed, and she rolled over to starboard and sank within a few minutes. Walker was last seen on the bridge, where he gave the order to abandon ship. Few other than those on deck got away—probably about one-third of the total complement. For a while thirty or so (including two officers⁸) clung to an *Oropesa* float drifting among the debris. There was much wreckage floating, including the ship's stern which reappeared and floated for some time. Those on the *Oropesa* float could hear shouts from around them in the darkness. Shortly a black shape was sighted some distance off. Some thought it the submarine, others the *Avon Vale*. Two men, Signalman Stewart and Stoker Greenfield⁹ decided to take the chance and swim to it. The chance came off, and a three-quarter-mile swim brought them to *Avon Vale* at 3.5 a.m. on the 27th. The destroyer, which did everything possible to pick up survivors from the debris-cluttered sea in the darkness, had already picked up nineteen survivors. Stewart and Greenfield were the last two she was able to find. Nothing more was seen of those

⁶ *U 559*, German submarine (1942), 517 tons, five torp tubes, 16.5 kts; sunk in E Mediterranean, 30 Oct 1942.

⁷ From the War Diary of *U 559*. *U 559* was sunk in the Eastern Mediterranean on 30 Oct 1942, by HM Ships *Pakenham*, *Petard*, *Hero*, *Dulverton* and *Hurworth*, and Wellesley aircraft of No. 47 Squadron RAF. She was the 132nd German submarine to be destroyed in the war.

⁸ Lt-Cdr P. W. Forwood, RANR. HMAS *Parramatta* 1940-41. Of Walkerville, SA; b. Woodville, SA, 22 Jan 1906. Lost in sinking of *Parramatta*, 27 Nov 1941.

Lt V. V. Johnston, RANR(S). HMAS *Parramatta* 1940-41. Of Adelaide; b. Brisbane, 12 Sep 1905. Lost in sinking of *Parramatta*, 27 Nov 1941.

⁹ Stoker F. H. Greenfield, S4876, RANR. HMAS's *Parramatta* 1941, *Napier* 1941-42, *Doomba* 1942-43. Of Strathfield, NSW; b. North Sydney, 26 Nov 1917.

who remained with the Oropesa float; nor were any more taken up from the sea. Subsequently, however, three ratings reached the shore between Tobruk and Bardia, and were there found by advancing British troops. In all, twenty-four ratings survived the sinking. Of the ship's complement of 160, one hundred and thirty-seven, including all the officers, lost their lives; one R.N. officer on passage was also lost.¹ *Hanne*, with her cargo of ammunition, was safely delivered at Tobruk by *Avon Vale*.²

IV

In a personal report to Hitler on the 13th November 1941, Raeder was outspoken in his criticism of Axis conduct of the war in the Mediterranean.

Today the enemy has complete naval and air supremacy in the area of the German transport routes; he is operating totally undisturbed in all parts of the Mediterranean. Malta is constantly being reinforced. Patrols in the Straits of Gibraltar have been intensified, evidently as the result of German submarine operations. The Italians are not able to bring about any major improvements in the situation, due to the oil situation and to their own operational and tactical impotence.³

Raeder instanced the destruction of the *51st Transport Squadron* during the night of October 8th-9th. He had reason for dissatisfaction, for British power in the Mediterranean was in the ascendant. In support of the land operations the Mediterranean Fleet ranged at will, safeguarding and strengthening British lines of communication, harassing and weakening the enemy's, and carrying out frequent telling bombardments of enemy positions in Libya. Yet within the next six weeks the situation was drastically to change, and British sea power in the Eastern Mediterranean to be reduced to a shadow by a series of heavy blows.

The first of these fell on the 25th November. In the early hours of the day before, two enemy convoys were reported at sea making for Benghazi. The 7th and 15th Cruiser Squadrons (the 15th now under the command of Rear-Admiral Vian⁴) sailed from Alexandria to try to intercept, followed later on the 24th by the battle fleet to provide heavy cover. *Hobart* was absent from the 7th Cruiser Squadron on this occasion. She was left at Alexandria, and Howden recorded that on board

a feeling of gloom prevailed, the ship knowing that the remaining ships of the squadron were operating on the enemy shipping routes, while *Hobart* was left in harbour awaiting docking for the removal of particularly heavy marine growth.

¹ *Parramatta's* complement totalled 9 officers and 151 ratings. Of these, 23 ratings survived, all RAN. Of the complement 7 ratings were RN on loan. There were also one RN officer and one RN rating on board taking passage, but not included in the complement of 160. Of these, the officer was lost but the rating saved. Total losses of RAN personnel—9 officers, 121 ratings; of RN personnel—one officer (on passage), 7 ratings. Total on board when ship sunk, 162.

² On 29 Nov 1941, two days after the loss of *Parramatta*, Admiral Cunningham signalled to the Naval Board: "I deeply deplore the loss of HMAS *Parramatta*. This fine little ship had built up for herself a splendid standard of efficiency and achievements fully in keeping with record of HMA Ships in Mediterranean. HMAS *Parramatta* was lost in defence of an important convoy under her charge which arrived safely at its destination. Please express my sympathy and that of Mediterranean Fleet to RAN and to bereaved."

³ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1941.

⁴ Vice-Adm King relinquished command of the 15th Cruiser Squadron to take up an appointment at the Admiralty. For a few weeks the squadron was commanded by Capt M. H. A. Kelsey, RN, of *Naiad*, until Vian assumed command on 1 Nov 1941. (Admiral of the Fleet Sir Philip Vian, GCB, KBE, DSO; RN. Comd HMS *Cossack* 1940-41, 15 Cruiser Sqn 1941-42, 1 Aircraft Carrier Sqn 1944-45; C-in-C Home Fleet 1950-52. B. Kent, Eng, 1894.)

At 4.25 p.m. on the 25th, when the battle fleet was patrolling between Crete and Cyrenaica, *Barham* was struck by three torpedoes from a submarine, and blew up with the explosion of a main magazine. *Nizam* was one of the destroyers on the screen, and with *Jervis*, *Jackal* and *Hotspur* closed the position, the four ships rescuing some 450 survivors. *Barham's* captain, 55 officers and 806 men were lost, but Admiral Pridham-Wippell, who was blown overboard by the explosion, was safely recovered by *Hotspur*. *Nizam* and *Jervis* later attacked what was believed to be a submarine, but without confirmation that it really was such.⁵ The cruiser squadrons did not encounter the convoys; but on the afternoon of the 24th November the Malta surface forces intercepted and sank an enemy convoy of two merchant ships. At the end of the month the Malta force was reinforced by *Ajax*, *Neptune*, *Kimberley* and *Kingston* from Alexandria.

On the 14th December the cruiser *Galatea*⁶ was sunk by a submarine, and further blows fell on the 19th December. On the 17th Vian, with the 15th Cruiser Squadron and destroyers, including *Nizam*, was escorting *Breconshire* from Alexandria with oil fuel for Malta. The enemy was simultaneously attempting to pass convoys to North Africa. The Italian Fleet, of two battleships with cruisers and destroyers, was at sea, and at 5.45 p.m. was sighted to the westward by Vian's force. Vian detached *Breconshire* to the southwards and closed in to attack. After firing a few salvos which straddled the British ships, the enemy retired to the north. Vian thereupon retrieved *Breconshire*, and shortly after passed her over to the Malta force which had come out to meet him. He returned to Alexandria on the 18th. That day the Italian Fleet turned south again, thus indicating that the enemy convoys would try to reach Africa during the night. The Malta force, the cruisers *Neptune*, *Aurora*, *Penelope*, and destroyers *Kandahar*, *Lance*, *Lively* and *Havock*, sailed to try to intercept off Tripoli. Early in the morning darkness of the 19th, in wild weather and a heavy sea, they ran into an enemy minefield. *Neptune* and *Kandahar* were sunk, and *Aurora* was badly damaged.

Neptune sank off Tripoli at about 4 a.m. on the 19th. At just about that hour two Italians were found clinging to the bow buoy of *Valiant* in Alexandria harbour. They were members of a party of six who had managed to enter the harbour on three torpedoes, the explosive heads of which, fitted with time fuses, they attached to *Valiant*, *Queen Elizabeth*, and the tanker *Sagona* (7,554 tons). Shortly after 6 a.m. on the 19th, the charges exploded. All three ships and the destroyer *Jervis* were badly damaged, the two battleships being put out of action for several months. Thus, in less than four weeks the Mediterranean Fleet lost its three battleships and was reduced to a small force of cruisers and destroyers.

⁵ The loss of *Barham* was kept secret until 27 Jan 1942. The responsible submarine was *U 331*, which was subsequently sunk by aircraft in the Mediterranean on 17 Nov 1942, when her captain, Freiherr von Tiesenhausen, was captured.

⁶ HMS *Galatea*, cruiser (1935), 5,220 tons, six 6-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 32.25 kts; sunk by German submarine off Alexandria, 14 Dec 1941.

Meanwhile events farther afield affected the Mediterranean. On the 7th December Japan attacked in the Western Pacific, and with a sudden naval-air blow on Pearl Harbour crippled the United States fleet when it was most needed. Not only did the necessity for all possible naval support in the Far East defer the day when the Mediterranean could be reinforced by heavy units and aircraft carriers; it also made a drain on existing forces there.

On the 9th December the Australian Advisory War Council recommended that the British Government be requested to return *Hobart* and *Yarra* to the Australia Station, and on the 11th the War Cabinet approved dispatch of a cablegram to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs asking that urgent instructions be issued to give effect to this request. So far as *Hobart* was concerned the Admiralty had apparently already issued instructions. The cruiser (whose two final operations in the Mediterranean were participation in a bombardment of the Bardia-Tobruk road on the 21st November, and the escorting early in December of *Breconshire* back to Alexandria on her return from the Malta passage mentioned above) sailed from Alexandria on the 9th of the month for the Far East. On the 18th December she arrived at Colombo, after calling at Minikoi in the Maldiv Islands to investigate reports of native unrest there. She left Colombo on the 24th December, and escorted troop convoy BM.9A (*Devonshire*, *Lancashire*, *Varsova*, *Ethiopia* and *Rajula*⁷) to Singapore, where she arrived on the 3rd January 1942.

While escorting *Breconshire* to Alexandria on the 7th December, *Hobart* intercepted signals from *Yarra* reporting that she was being attacked by aircraft off Tobruk. *Yarra* was then on her final Tobruk convoy escort run, in company with the British sloop *Flamingo*. The air attack she reported was by about thirty-five aircraft, including dive bombers, and in it *Flamingo* was put out of action by a near miss, and *Yarra* had to tow her into Tobruk. The Australian sloop returned to Alexandria on the 9th December, and on the 16th sailed thence for the Far East. She reached Colombo on the 30th December.

Other units were also sailed from the Mediterranean for the Far East, among them *Napier*, *Nizam* and *Nestor*. This last-named, after a period with Force "H", and spending October and November undergoing engine repairs in the United Kingdom, returned to Gibraltar on the 16th December. At 10.50 a.m. on the previous day, when south-west of Cape St Vincent in company with the destroyers *Gurkha*,⁸ *Foxhound* and *Croome*,⁹ *Nestor* sighted a submarine (later identified as *U 127*¹) on the surface. Rosenthal at once turned towards and increased speed, and at 11 a.m. opened fire at 11,000 yards. The submarine submerged, and at 11.15 a.m. *Nestor* obtained contact and attacked with depth charges. Subse-

⁷ Of 11,100, 9,557, 4,701, 5,574 and 8,478 tons respectively.

⁸ HMS *Gurkha*, destroyer (1941), 1,920 tons, six 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36.5 kts; sunk in Eastern Mediterranean, 17 Jan 1942.

⁹ HMS *Croome*, destroyer (1940), 904 tons, four 4-in AA guns, two 21-in torp tubes, 27.5 kts.

¹ *U 127*, German submarine (1940), 740 tons, six torp tubes, 18.5 kts; sunk 15 Dec 1941.

quently a heavy under-water explosion was felt. Oil, and samples of wreckage and human remains collected by the destroyers, confirmed the destruction of the submarine, which was credited to *Nestor*.²

U 127 was the first submarine to be destroyed during the war by a ship of the Royal Australian Navy, but not the first to be destroyed by a ship commanded by an Australian officer. On the 4th October 1941 the trawler H.M.S. *Lady Shirley*,³ commanded by Lieut-Commander Callaway,⁴ encountered a surfaced submarine south-west of the Canary Islands. The submarine submerged, was forced to the surface by depth charges, and then engaged by gun fire. This was so effective that the Germans could not man their own gun (though they did bring a machine-gun into action) and within a few minutes three of the submarine's officers, including the captain, and five ratings were killed. The surviving senior officer surrendered and gave orders to abandon and scuttle the vessel. *Lady Shirley* picked up the forty-five survivors, one of whom died. The submarine had a total complement of 53; the *Lady Shirley*, whose gunlayer was killed in the action, had little more than half that number.

On the 22nd December *Nestor* sailed from Gibraltar on the screen of the cruiser *Dido*, which was rejoining the Mediterranean Fleet after repairs. Malta was reached on the 24th December, and here convoy ME.8 (including *Nestor's* earlier companion *Sydney Star*) was picked up and escorted to Alexandria, which was reached on the 29th December. *Nestor* then joined the 7th Flotilla with *Napier* (D)7, and *Nizam*. The three ships took part in a bombardment of Bardia on the 31st December. On the 3rd January 1942 they sailed from Alexandria and passed through the Suez Canal on their way to join the Eastern Fleet. For the first time for over two years there were no ships of the Royal Australian Navy in the Mediterranean.

In Libya the land fighting had gone well for the British. On the 8th December Tobruk was relieved after a siege of 242 days. Derna was captured on the 19th of the month and Benghazi on the 24th. But on the 2nd December Hitler had issued "Directive 38" ordering the transfer to the South Italian and North African area of an Air Fleet and the necessary air defences released from Russia. These forces were placed under the command of Field Marshal Kesselring, whose primary task was "To achieve air and sea mastery in the area between Southern Italy and North Africa and thus ensure safe lines of communication with Libya

* Able Seaman McLeod first sighted the submarine. Sub-Lieut Colclough first confirmed it as such. Able Seamen Healey and Krautz were Asdic operators throughout the attack. Mr Fennessy operated the plot.

AB J. V. Healey, DSM, 20854, RAN. HMS *Maori* 1940; HMAS's *Nestor* 1941-42, *San Michele* 1942, *Townsville* 1943. Of Henley Beach, SA; b. Norwood, SA, 10 Aug 1917.

Ldg Seaman A. M. Krautz, 21095, RAN. HMS *Fearless* 1939-40; HMS *Nimrod* 1940-41; HMAS *Nestor* 1941-42. Of Toowoomba, Qld; b. Toowoomba, 6 Jul 1918.

Instr Cdr R. G. Fennessy, DSC; RAN. HMAS's *Adelaide* 1940, *Nestor* 1941-42, *Napier* 1942. Of South Yarra, Vic; b. Warrnambool, Vic, 25 Jun 1910.

* HMS *Lady Shirley*, trawler (1937), 472 tons; sunk with all hands (presumed torpedoed) in Straits of Gibraltar, 11 Dec 1941.

* Lt-Cdr A. H. Callaway, DSO; RANVR. HMAS *Yarra* 1939-40; HMS's *Badger* Feb-Mar 1941, *Paragon* Mar-Jun 1941. B. Sydney, 3 Apr 1906; lost in sinking of HMS *Lady Shirley*, 11 Dec 1941.

and Cyrenaica". At a time which, as Cunningham later wrote, found "our naval forces in the Mediterranean at their lowest ebb", Kesselring was able to achieve his object to a marked degree and to swing the pendulum of supply to an extent which broke the British hold on Cyrenaica, endangered Malta, and once again made the nourishment of Tobruk a major naval problem. For the British the New Year of 1942 came darkly over the Mediterranean scene.

CHAPTER 12

THE AUSTRALIA STATION—1941

ON the Australia Station the year 1941 was, in the main, a period of building up in preparation for an extension of the war on a major scale in the Far East. Long recognised as a possibility, such extension increasingly loomed as a probability as the year progressed, until the storm finally burst in the Pacific in December.

Meanwhile, after the German raider attack on Nauru Island on the 27th December 1940, the Australia Station had remained free from enemy attack until November 1941. Alarms and false reports were not wanting however, mainly of sightings of "submarines"; nor was there lack of evidence of the visits of the raiders the previous year. Scarce a month of 1941 passed without one or more of the mines then laid being swept up, sighted floating, or found washed ashore on beaches, to a total of forty-nine.¹ Most of them were from, and near, the fields laid off the Spencer Gulf, Hobart, Bass Strait, and the New South Wales coast between Sydney and Newcastle; but one of the dummy mines laid by *Orion* in September 1940 off Albany, Western Australia, was in November 1941 washed ashore in King George Sound, and the following month a German mine was recovered in Hervey Bay, Queensland.

The swept mines were accounted for by the ships of the 20th Mine-sweeping Flotilla in conjunction with the minesweeping groups based on the ports in the various areas. Some of the "floaters" were sighted (and in a number of instances destroyed by rifle fire) by coastal merchant ships. One, which was sighted off Montague Island in November 1941, was picked up by the auxiliary minesweeper *Uki*,² landed on her deck, and brought to port. About a third of the mines were found washed ashore on beaches and were dealt with by R.M.S. (Rendering Mines Safe) parties from the nearest naval depot. Casualties resulting from enemy mines in Australian waters during 1941 were fortunately few. Only one vessel was sunk, and a total of nine lives lost. On the 26th March the trawler *Millimumul* (287 tons) fishing off the New South Wales coast, fouled and exploded a mine in her trawl and was lost with seven of her crew; and on the 14th July two ratings³ of an R.M.S. party from the Port Adelaide depot were killed when a mine exploded on the beach at Beachport, South Australia. *Millimumul* sank just on the 100 fathom line thirty miles due east from Broken Bay and twenty miles S.S.E. from where *Nimbin* was similarly lost in December 1940. The mine was sighted in the trawl before it exploded and its condition, heavily covered with marine growth,

¹ At the end of 1941 the total of German mines accounted for in Australian waters was 73—24 in 1940, 49 in 1941. This was from a total of 234 laid, including the dummies laid by *Orion* off Albany, W.A.

² HMAS *Uki*, auxiliary minesweeper (1923; commnd RAN 1939), 545 tons, one 12-pdr gun, 9 kts.

³ AB W. L. E. Danswan, 20548, RAN. HMAS *Canberra* 1935-Feb 1941. Of Temora, NSW; b. Temora, 16 Mar 1918. Killed by mine explosion, 14 Jul 1941.

AB T. W. Todd, PA439, RANR. Of Glanville, SA; b. Glanville, 18 Apr 1911. Killed by mine explosion, 14 Jul 1941.

indicated that it came from a field as old as that which sank *Nimbin*. The Beachport mine was probably from the Spencer Gulf field.

At intervals during the year's sweeping operations the 20th Flotilla was joined for varying periods by new corvettes, fourteen of which, built under the Government's naval building program, came into commission in 1941.⁴

It will be recalled that at June 1940 the naval shipbuilding program included 17 corvettes; seven for the R.A.N. and 10 on Admiralty account. The following August this program was expanded. In that month the Naval Board told the Government that it considered a minimum of 59 local defence vessels for minesweeping and anti-submarine work was then essential "in the light of the present position in Europe and as an assurance against the possibility of Japanese intervention". Of this number 34 were already approved, seven corvettes and 27 vessels requisitioned from the coastal trade. It was proposed, and approved, that a further 17 corvettes be built for the R.A.N., bringing the total to 24; and that eight more coastal traders be requisitioned for local work, making the requisitioned total 35. In addition, a further 10 corvettes were ordered for Admiralty account and four for the Royal Indian Navy, so that in August 1940 the corvette building program was for 48 vessels, 20 of which were for the Admiralty.⁵ The requisitioning of another nine coastal vessels for minesweeping⁶ was approved in February 1941, and the following July the naval shipbuilding program was again expanded by the inclusion of 12 additional corvettes (bringing the total up to 60, at which it remained) and six of a new and larger type known as frigates.

The old terms "Corvette" and "Frigate" were revived by the Admiralty in 1940 and 1942 respectively to meet the need for some designation of new warship types brought into being by the changing conditions of sea warfare. The prototype of the corvette had been called "whaler" which was, Churchill pointed out, "an entire misnomer as they are not going to catch whales". The Australian corvettes were of 650 tons, mostly armed with a 4-inch gun (though some had a 12-pounder as main armament) and light anti-aircraft guns, and had a speed of 15½ knots. They were named after Australian towns. The Australian frigates were of 1,420 tons, armed with two 4-inch guns and light anti-aircraft guns, and with a speed of 20 knots. They were named after Australian rivers.

In the war of 1939-45, as in the previous world conflict, the shortage of merchant ship tonnage quickly became a matter of concern to Australia. Preliminary moves towards the establishment of a merchant ship-

⁴ *Lismore* (Jan); *Goulburn* (Feb); *Burnie* (Apr); *Bendigo* (May); *Lithgow*, *Maryborough* (Jun); *Mildura* (July); *Ballarat* (Aug); *Warrnambool* (Sep); *Wollongong*, *Toowoomba* (Oct); *Deloraine* (Nov); *Katoomba*, *Townsville* (Dec). The months are those of commissioning. Of these, *Goulburn*, *Burnie*, *Lithgow*, *Maryborough*, *Mildura*, *Ballarat* and *Warrnambool* operated at some time or another with the 20th Flotilla during 1941.

⁵ The corvettes built on Admiralty account were: *Bathurst*, *Ballarat*, *Bendigo*, *Broome*, *Burnie*, *Cairns*, *Cessnock*, *Gawler*, *Geraldton*, *Goulburn*, *Ipswich*, *Kalgoorlie*, *Launceston*, *Lismore*, *Maryborough*, *Pirle*, *Tamworth*, *Toowoomba*, *Whyalla*, *Wollongong*.

⁶ During 1941 the following auxiliary minesweepers, requisitioned from trade, were commissioned: *Toorie*, *Terka* (Jan); *Coombar* (Apr); *Paterson*, *Bombo* (May); *Narani* (Jun); *Birchgrove Park* (Aug); *Allenwood*, *Kianga*, *Warrawee* (Sep); *Marrawah* (Dec).

building industry had been made before the outbreak of war, and in June 1939 the Tariff Board reported on the establishment of a bounty for shipbuilding. The matter was carried a step further in April 1940 when the Full Cabinet considered a submission from the Department of Trade and Customs, based upon a report by A. R. Townsend⁷ on the possibilities and problems of merchant ship construction in Australia. The Cabinet referred the matter to a sub-committee which the following month recommended the construction of standard ships as soon as possible. Other urgent matters, including the increase in naval building, tended to crowd out the question of merchant ship construction, but towards the end of 1940 the Third Naval Member of the Naval Board (Engineer Rear-Admiral McNeil) presented to the War Cabinet a memorandum on the position of shipbuilding and the possibility of future developments. He stated that if action were taken immediately it should be possible to have five or six berths equipped for merchant shipbuilding with the tapering off of the naval construction program towards the end of 1941. Arising from these preliminary moves a Shipbuilding Board was established in March 1941, with McNeil as deputy chairman and Director of Shipbuilding while retaining his position on the Naval Board. As the beginning of a program which was subsequently recast in the light of events, orders were placed for eight ships, each of 9,300 tons deadweight. The keel of the first of these, the *River Clarence*, was laid at Cockatoo Island Dockyard on the 29th July 1941.⁸

The combined naval and merchant shipbuilding programs as they stood in July 1941 were then estimated to absorb all building facilities available in Australia until around the end of 1943, so that the Naval Board found it impossible to undertake further naval construction for the Admiralty and the Royal Indian Navy, though that had been sought. The prospect of meagre shipping space for exports made merchant ship construction in Australia (as Mr Menzies told the War Cabinet in May 1941 on his return from Britain) "appear to be an essential corollary both from the practical and political angles".

In addition to new construction work, Australian shipyards during the war up to September 1941 fitted 214 ships with defensive armament, 216 with paravanes, and degaussed 198 vessels.⁹

The naval building program naturally called for an increase in the numbers of officers and men in the R.A.N. to man the ships as they commissioned. This applied not only to the vessels intended for the R.A.N., but also to the twenty corvettes being built for the Admiralty, as it had

⁷ A. R. Townsend, OBE. Chief Investigation Offr, Customs Dept, and C'wealth Govt Shipping, Cotton, Tobacco and Sugar Adviser. Of Canberra; b. Brunswick, Vic, 3 Mar 1891. Died 24 Apr 1944.

⁸ Known as "River" class freighters, eight of these vessels were completed before the end of the war: one at Cockatoo Island Dockyard; one at Williamstown Dockyard; 2 at Evans, Deakin's yard at Brisbane; and 4 at the yard of the Broken Hill Pty at Whyalla.

For details of merchant shipbuilding see S. J. Butlin, *War Economy* (in this history).

⁹ Degaussing was a method of demagnetising ships by fitting coils which could be electrically charged and thus counter the magnetism generated in the vessels when building. It was a safeguard against magnetic mines. Ships defensively armed were: British and Allied 171, Australian 43; equipped with paravanes: British and Allied 132, Australian 84; degaussed: British and Allied 120, Australian 78.

been agreed that the R.A.N. would man these. In addition, while Mr Menzies was in Britain early in 1941, it was proposed to him that the Australian Navy might be prepared to man a further three "N" class destroyers, making a flotilla of eight of this class. This was agreed to in July 1941,¹ when it was estimated that a regular monthly intake of 400 recruits (which rate had been decided upon by the Naval Board in December 1940) would achieve an expansion sufficient to meet all manning requirements then visualised. Recruiting offices had been opened in capital cities in all States, and in March 1941 an Inspector of Naval Recruiting² was appointed. His headquarters were at Navy Office, and he was responsible for the general organisation of recruiting, including publicity.

By September 1941 the R.A.N. had 68 ships in commission (excluding those manned for the R.N. and classified as H.M. Australian Ships) ranging from cruisers to a tug. Mobilised strength was 19,740 officers and men. Of this number 8,640 were in H.M.A. Ships on the Australia Station; 3,500 were in H.M.A. Ships overseas; 300 were in H.M. armed merchant cruiser *Kanimbla*; 900 were on special service in the Royal Navy³ and in defensively armed merchant ships; and 6,400 were in Australian shore establishments, including wireless stations, boom defence depots, war signal stations, base staffs, and recruits under training.

In order to balance numbers in the permanent service at post-war complements, all recruits were, as a wartime measure, entered through the Royal Australian Naval Reserve, and signed an agreement for the duration of hostilities instead of the customary twelve years' engagement. A quota system operated as between the various States. Recruits when entered were drafted to Flinders Naval Depot where they received twenty weeks' intensive training, after which they could be drafted to sea for additional training under practical conditions. There was no shortage of applicants, and recruiting offices in all States had waiting lists and unmobilised pools. The limiting factors controlling the rate of intake were

¹ In the event only two additional RN destroyers were manned by the RAN, *Quiberon* and *Quickmatch*. By the time Australian agreement to man the three extra ships was received, the Admiralty had allocated all the "N" class, *Napier*, *Nizam*, *Nestor*, *Norman* and *Nepal* to the RAN and two to the Dutch and one to the Poles. The Admiralty then proposed that the RAN should instead man three "M" class vessels, *Meteor*, *Musketeer* and *Myrmidon*, due to complete about the middle of 1942. There was however difficulty regarding the supply of ammunition in the Far East to these ships (stocks of their type not being carried) and in January 1942 the Admiralty proposed that the RAN should instead man three "Q's" completing contemporaneously, *Quiberon*, *Quickmatch* and *Quality*, ships which "have an endurance approximately 15% greater than that of the 'M' class destroyers and are therefore exceptionally well suited to the long ocean passages involved in Far Eastern waters". The Naval Board concurred in this proposal in January 1942, but the following March told the Admiralty that they now found difficulty in providing sufficient ratings to man all three destroyers, and suggested manning *Quiberon* and *Quickmatch* only. The Admiralty agreed.

Conditions governing the commitment to man the five destroyers and the 20 corvettes were: The Commonwealth accepted the liability for the pay and allowances of the crews, but the Admiralty provided the ships and retained entire liability for their maintenance. They were commissioned as HM Australian Ships.

² Cdr O. A. Jones, RD; RNR. (HMS *Donegal* 1914-18.) Inspector of Naval Recruiting RAN 1941-45. Of Double Bay, NSW; b. Highbury, Eng, 15 Jun 1893.

³ Up to September 1941 the RAN supplied the RN with 96 Reserve officers and 172 Reserve ratings with limited anti-submarine qualifications; and had recruited for the RN and sent to the United Kingdom 160 officers and 200 ratings brought in under the "Yachtsmen Scheme"—selected from men with yachting experience.

primarily lack of experienced instructors and of accommodation in sea-going ships for the practical training of recruits.

The expansion in numbers (manning the destroyers and corvettes for the R.N. alone involved some 3,000 officers and men) necessitated the provision of increased accommodation and training facilities at the naval depots in the various States and at Flinders; and the numbers of both uniformed and civil base staffs, in the States and at Navy Office, grew rapidly. Among other naval works the building of large new blocks progressed at Flinders Naval Depot; and in February 1941 approval was given to the construction of a new naval depot at Balmoral, Sydney;⁴ and in July to the building of a naval base at Fremantle. On the 1st March 1941 the main administrative departments at Navy Office moved into a commodious new four-storey building (which they henceforth shared with the Air Force central administration) in the Victoria Barracks compound in St Kilda Road, Melbourne.⁵

The uniform of the naval rating was now familiar in the seaport cities of the Commonwealth, especially in Sydney and Melbourne, where were the greatest concentrations, at Sydney as the main fleet base, and at Melbourne because of the proximity of Flinders Naval Depot. To an extent ratings suffered by reason of their uniforms, and it was found that certain of the leading hotels and some other establishments such as more expensive dance halls, refused them accommodation or admission. Naval Intelligence Officers sent to interview offending proprietors and managers were met with specious explanations such as: the rule was "dress", and naval ratings wore no collars or ties; or the ban was really in the interest of ratings, who would feel uncomfortable in the presence of officers. This offensive practice, by means of which some individuals took it upon themselves to deprive volunteers in the naval service of their citizen rights, was by no means widespread, but was sufficiently prevalent to merit notice and protest by the Director of Naval Intelligence.

The catering, with accommodation and food, to the needs of large numbers of ratings from distant States on week-end leave in Melbourne and Sydney, constituted a problem which was largely met by voluntary effort on the part of interested citizens. Naval pay was not high, and at the outbreak of war ranged in the Seaman Branch from 1s 9d a day for an Ordinary Seaman, 2nd Class, under 17 years of age, to 7s a day for an Able Seaman and 11s a day for a Chief Petty Officer, with slightly higher rates for tradesmen.⁶ In October 1941 these rates were increased by 1s a day to meet increased cost of living, and there was a further

⁴ The Balmoral depot commissioned as HMAS *Penguin II* in July 1942. It housed a pool drawn upon for urgent fleet requirements, and for various duties around Sydney.

⁵ Through its Victualling Dept the RAN supplied large quantities of victualling stores to Admiralty victualling yards at Alexandria, Singapore, Colombo, Capetown and Durban, and to the War Board, India. Up to September 1941 the value of stores so supplied since the outbreak of war in 1939 was £1,797,000. The RAN also supplied provisions to the AIF abroad to the value of £208,000, until this service was taken over by the Army.

⁶ For example a Chief Mechanician, 1st Class; a Chief Engine Room Artificer, 1st Class; a Chief Shipwright, 1st Class; received 14s 6d a day. All married ratings qualified for a marriage allowance of 4s 6d a day for a wife, and, for children, daily allowances of 3s for the first, 2s for the second, and 1s 6d each for any others.

similar increase of 6d a day in August 1942. Ratings, however, had generally little money to spend on necessities on week-end leave. In Sydney a naval centre where inexpensive accommodation and food could be obtained had for long been in existence; and in July 1940 Admiral Colvin arranged at his home a preliminary meeting of persons interested in accumulating a naval fund, part of which would go to the establishment of a similar hostel in Melbourne. The result was the establishment of the Royal Australian Naval Patriotic Committee under the chairmanship of Mr D. York Syme, a prominent Melbourne shipowner, with Mr R. Collins, a brother of Captain Collins, as honorary secretary. Premises were secured in the Western Market at the south-east corner of the Collins-William streets intersection, and "Navy House" was opened on 18th October 1940. Under the guidance of the committee, and staffed entirely by devoted voluntary women workers, it functioned throughout the war supplying low-priced accommodation and food to naval ratings,⁷ and providing an invaluable service.

The expansion in numbers in naval service had a further effect, a shortage of trained telegraphists which led to the enrolment of women and ultimately to the establishment of the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service. The suggestion that women might be enrolled as telegraphists had its genesis in the work of the Women's Emergency Signalling Corps, a voluntary organisation inaugurated in Sydney in 1939 by Mrs F. V. McKenzie.⁸ In response to a naval newspaper advertisement appealing for radio amateurs to enlist as telegraphists, Mrs McKenzie in December 1940 wrote to the Minister for the Navy (Mr Hughes) offering the services of members of the Women's Emergency Signalling Corps. The following month Commander Newman,⁹ Director of Signals and Communications, examined some members of the corps and found them highly proficient in wireless telegraphy procedure, and recommended to the Naval Board that they be employed at port war signal stations and other shore establishments. This recommendation was supported by Commodore Muirhead-Gould, Commodore-in-Charge, Sydney.¹ The Naval Board agreed in principle, and on the 18th April 1941 Mr Hughes approved the employment of twelve telegraphists and two attendants—selected from the Women's Emergency Signalling Corps—for duty at Harman wireless station, Canberra. These first fourteen of a branch ultimately to reach a peak wartime establishment of 105 officers and 2,518 ratings engaged in many activities

⁷ Scales of charges were: bed and breakfast, 1s 6d; dinner (roast lamb, green peas, potatoes, fruit salad and cream) 9d; tea or coffee, 1d; milk, 2d; plate of soup, 3d; eggs and bacon, 6d. From its establishment in October 1940 until it was closed in July 1946, Navy House provided 214,607 beds, and 659,857 meals to ratings in Melbourne.

⁸ Mrs F. V. McKenzie, OBE, founded in 1939 and directed the Women's Emergency Signalling Corps, which trained 1,000 girl telegraphists for the Services and gave instruction to some 12,000 servicemen during the war. Electrical engineer; of Sydney; b. Melbourne.

⁹ Capt J. B. Newman, RAN. (HMS *Canada*, 1917.) Specialised in signals. In 1939 appointed Officer-in-Charge Shore Wireless Stations and Director of Naval Communications, Navy Office, where he remained throughout the war. Supt Weapons Research Estab, Woomera, since 1954. Of Melbourne; b. Geelong, Vic, 14 May 1899.

¹ Rear-Adm G. C. Muirhead-Gould, DSC; RN. Cmdre-in-Charge, Sydney, and Principal Sea Transport Officer, NSW, 1 Apr 1940-19 Mar 1942 when promoted to Rear-Admiral and continued with title Flag-Officer-in-Charge Sydney and PSTO, NSW, until Sep 1944, when reverted to Royal Navy. Was Naval Attaché, Berlin, 1933-36. B. London, 29 May 1889. Died 26 Jun 1945.

and serving in all mainland naval centres, took up their duties at Harman on the 28th April 1941. By the end of the year the W.R.A.N.S. establishment had grown to about fifty communications ratings, most of them brought in from the original Sydney source. It was not until October 1942 that general recruiting for W.R.A.N.S., to be employed in a variety of duties, was opened in all States.

The year 1941 saw also the birth of the Naval Auxiliary Patrol. This organisation had its genesis in a suggestion by Captain Burnett, Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, in December 1940 (arising from the German raider activity at Nauru) that use be made of yachts and yachtsmen on a volunteer basis to supplement patrols of swept channels and harbour anchorages. There were at the time three volunteer yachtsmen's organisations in existence, two in Sydney which were employed in providing security patrols in the harbour in conjunction with the State police, and one at Maryborough, Queensland, which, though not actively employed, was eager to provide similar service. Of the Sydney organisations, the Volunteer Coast Patrol and the National Emergency Service Yachtsmen's Auxiliary, the first named was of longer standing. It was founded during 1936 by a young Sydney business man, Harold Nobbs,² a patriotic and enthusiastic yachtsman with a profound knowledge of, and connections along, the Sydney waterfront. He suggested its formation to Commander Long, then Staff Officer (Intelligence), Sydney. Nobbs proposed forming a group of yachtsmen who might be debarred, by age or inability to pass the medical tests, from volunteering for any of the Services in the event of war. This group would provide boats and crews for harbour and coastal defence purposes, on a voluntary, spare-time basis. Long endeavoured, unsuccessfully at the time, to interest the naval authorities in this proposal. Nobbs and his supporters went ahead with an organisation which they named the Volunteer Coastal Patrol, and approached Captain Blackwood, a retired officer of the Royal Navy, to lead and train the organisation. On this basis it went ahead, and in May 1941 had a membership of approximately 400, with subsidiary organisations at 29 outports in New South Wales, while tentative arrangements had been made for its establishment in 22 outports in Victoria and one in Queensland. Members were trained in elementary navigation, signalling, seamanship and first aid, and some 200 vessels were on the register. In June 1941 the Naval Board agreed to the formation of an organisation based on that of the Volunteer Coastal Patrol, and to be known as the Naval Auxiliary Patrol. A member of the Volunteer Coastal Patrol³ was enrolled as lieutenant in the R.A.N.V.R. to act as liaison officer and build up the organisation, which would operate on an entirely voluntary and honorary basis in coastal waters. As a preliminary step, recruiting officers were

²Lt H. W. G. Nobbs, RANVR. Special Intell Duties and with Security Services 1941-45. Company director; of Manly, NSW; b. Toronto, Canada, 7 Dec 1908.

³Lt R. H. W. Power, RANVR. Plans Division, Navy Office, 1941-44. Of Sydney; b. Auckland, NZ, 5 May 1894.

The Naval Auxiliary Patrol was disbanded at the end of the war, but the Volunteer Coastal Patrol was then reorganised on its original basis, and as such grew in strength.

appointed in Melbourne and Sydney. By the end of the year the organisation was in process of formation at a number of mainland ports and in Tasmania.⁴

The year witnessed changes in the Naval Board. At the end of December 1940 Commodore Boucher, who had been Second Naval Member since May 1939, reverted to the Royal Navy and was succeeded by Commodore Durnford,⁵ a British officer who had seen service in command in the war of 1914-18 and also in the war now being fought. He had also good knowledge of the R.A.N. in which he served on exchange for four years from 1928 to 1932, during part of that time commanding the destroyer flotilla. He was bluff and forthright, easily approachable, and sympathetic to the Australian outlook. In April 1941 membership of the Board was expanded by the appointment of Mr Brain,⁶ a Melbourne company director and secretary, as Business Member.

In July Admiral Colvin, on whom the strain of four strenuous years as First Naval Member had told, retired owing to ill health. He had done good service for Australia and the R.A.N., and it was largely due to his recommendation that the ships should experience overseas war service that, by the time of his retirement, every ship of size in the R.A.N. had used its guns in action, and a large proportion of officers and men in the navy had gained actual and invaluable experience under the new conditions of air-sea warfare. He had informed the Government in February 1941 of the necessity for his retirement on medical advice, and negotiations were opened with the Admiralty regarding his successor. In the succeeding months prior to his relief he led the Australian delegation to the American-Dutch-British conferences at Singapore in April. During his absence from Australia, and from his office owing to ill health, Durnford acted as First Naval Member, and Captain Crane,⁷ Captain Superintendent of Training, acted as Second Naval Member. Colvin, succeeded as First Naval Member and Chief of the Naval Staff on 18th July 1941 by Vice-Admiral Royle,⁸ returned to Britain. At Colvin's final attendance at a War Cabinet meeting on the 10th July 1941,

⁴ Conditions under which the NAP was established were: It would be recruited on an entirely voluntary basis, would be controlled by its own officers, and members could wear authorised uniform while on duty, they themselves providing uniforms and badges at their own expense. The NAP would operate with the official approval of the Naval Board. The Department of the Navy would bear the cost of any alterations or special equipment to fit vessels for special duty; but generally speaking the allowable costs would be limited to the provision of fuel and oil consumed on duty. Enrolment and service with the NAP would not release a member from any obligation for service under the laws of the Commonwealth. Subsequently a number of the yachts were chartered or purchased outright by the navy; and in April 1943 the NAP was transferred to the RANVR; all members were medically examined and fit men were mobilised. Those not medically fit could continue as unmobilised members.

⁵ Vice-Adm J. W. Durnford, CB; RN. (Comd destroyers 1914-18.) On loan to RAN 1928-32, when executive officer *Adelaide*, *Albatross*, *Brisbane*, and commanded Aust destroyer flotilla. CSO Malta 1937-39; comd HMS *Suffolk* 1939-40; 2nd Naval Member ACNB 1940-42; comd HMS *Resolution* 1942-43; Dir of Naval Training, Admiralty, 1944-47. Of London; b. 25 Oct 1891.

⁶ H. G. Brain, OBE, MSM. (1st AIF: Pte 31 Bn 1915, capt and DAAG 1918.) Chairman, Baillieu Education Trusts; Business Member, Aust Naval Board, 1941-42 and 1944-46; DAQMG VDC, Vic, 1943-46. Of Elsternwick, Vic; b. Toorak, Vic, 3 Dec 1890.

⁷ Cmdre H. B. Crane, CBE; RN. On loan to RAN as Capt Supt of Training 1939-41; comd HMS *Birmingham* 1941-43; Cmdre RN Barracks, Sydney, 1944-45. B. 19 Jun 1894.

⁸ Admiral Sir Guy Royle, KCB, CMG; RN. Naval Attaché British Embassy, Tokyo, 1924-27; comd HMS *Glorious* (aircraft carrier) 1932-34; Naval Secretary to 1st Lord of Admiralty 1934-37; Vice-Adm comdg Aircraft Carriers 1937-39; 5th Sea Lord 1940-41; Chief of Naval Air Services 1939-41; 1st Naval Member and CNS 1941-45. B. 1885. Died 4 Jan 1954.

the Prime Minister referred to the value placed by the War Cabinet on his rich and varied experience in naval matters, "particularly his wise views on strategy, which had always been expressed with the greatest frankness". With his retirement his services were not entirely lost to Australia, and soon after his arrival in England in October 1941, he was appointed naval adviser to the Australian High Commissioner in London.

Colvin's successor, Vice-Admiral Royle, was a British officer of wide experience, both operational and administrative, and with an outstanding record. He knew the Japanese, having been British Naval Attaché in Tokyo 1924-1927; he specialised in naval aviation, and had commanded aircraft carriers in peace and war; his immediately preceding appointment was administrative, that of Fifth Sea Lord on the Board of Admiralty where he represented the Royal Navy's aviation interests. He came to Australia a sick man, temporarily mentally exhausted from a period of considerable strain overseas, to shoulder increasing burdens.

A political crisis during August and September 1941 resulted, first in the removal of Mr Menzies from leadership of the Government, and then in the defeat of the Government in the House of Representatives. On the 3rd October a Labour government assumed office at Canberra, with Mr Curtin as Prime Minister. Mr Makin¹ succeeded Mr Hughes as Minister for the Navy. One result of the changes, both of national and naval administrations, was a gradual shift of emphasis away from the navy in the Australian war effort, with its voice carrying less weight in policy-shaping deliberations. Coming events were to give prominence to the naval air weapon, the success of which, in Japanese hands in a series of spectacular naval engagements, tended to obscure the fact that the success was due to the use of the weapon as an adjunct to the naval surface weapons, and not to some quality in the air weapon which made those surface weapons obsolete. Hitherto in the war the record of the Royal Australian Navy had been one of almost unbroken successes enhanced by almost complete freedom from casualties. In the immediately forthcoming months losses, both of ships and men, were to be heavy and unmitigated by compensating triumph in action. Lacking Colvin's experience in the Australian political field, and the status he had held as an adviser both during the immediate pre-war years and the war years of naval prosperity, Royle, in his tired condition, was handicapped in combating fallacious arguments which represented air power as a decisive weapon in itself, and not as an addition to existing land and sea weapons; and in consequence was also handicapped in upholding the navy's prestige with the Government. In the circumstances, his association with the Government was less happy than that of his predecessor with the previous administration.

There were also changes, and expansion, in the Naval Staff, which had been reorganised in May 1940 with the establishment of Operations and

¹ Hon N. J. O. Makin. MHR 1919-46 and since 1954; Speaker 1929-31; Min for Navy and for Munitions 1941-43, for Aircraft Production 1945-46. Aust Ambassador to USA 1946-51. Of Woodville, SA; b. Petersham, NSW, 31 Mar 1889.

Plans Divisions, and the appointment of Directors thereof. Commander Burrell became the first Director of Operations, and Commander Martin² of Plans.³ The appointment of Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff was advanced to that of Deputy Chief. In May 1941, Captain Burnett, who held the position up to then, was appointed in command of H.M.A.S. *Sydney* vice Captain Collins. He was succeeded at Navy Office by Captain Getting from *Kanimbla*.

II

In many directions work proceeded to bring the country's naval defences to the best possible state to meet a threat in the Pacific. During 1941 preliminary excavation went ahead on the capital ship graving dock in Sydney (eliciting vehement protest from sections of the Potts Point community who objected to a naval base in proximity to their homes), and towards the end of the year the construction of the coffer-dam by the Sydney Maritime Services Board was well advanced. At that time a program of work provided that the dock should be ready to take a ship in August 1944. By September 1941 seaward defences were established or under construction at Fremantle, Sydney and Darwin. Indicator loops were installed and operating at these ports; and in January 1941 an anti-torpedo boom was launched and secured at Fremantle. At Darwin the main section of the boom was completed, and an anti-submarine net was being laid.

In addition to boom defences, a naval mining policy was, in September 1940, submitted to the War Cabinet, and approved. As early as 1923 the Admiralty recommended to the Naval Board that naval mines should be manufactured in Australia.⁴ No action resulted for some time, though the subject was kept alive by repeated suggestions from the Admiralty; and in December 1937 it was still stated, in reply to a request from the Admiralty, that the manufacture of mines in Australia was not then possible, but the position would be reviewed within twelve months. During that period negotiations proceeded with the Ford Manufacturing Company of Australia for the production of complete units, mineshells and sinkers, at an annexe to the company's works at Geelong, Victoria; and in October 1939 an agreement with that company was signed. The following month the first order for 500 mines was placed. In April 1940 (in which month the Admiralty placed an order for 500 mines) it was decided to prepare plans for normal defensive minefields to meet a possible Eastern

² Cdr W. H. Martin, RAN. Comd HMAS *Moresby* 1939 and 1940; Dir of Plans 1940; Officer-in-Charge Hydrographic Dept 1941. Of Robertson, NSW; b. Robertson, 18 Feb 1903. Lost in sinking of HMAS *Perth*, 1 Mar 1942.

³ The Director of Operations was responsible for trade defence, troop convoys and cover, movements, local defence (operational), naval control and examination services, and general current staff problems. The Director of Plans was responsible for war plans, training policy and the use of weapons, local defence policy including anti-submarine and minesweeping vessels and equipment, minelaying, booms, asdics, and liaison with the army and air force. Later an officer solely responsible for navigational problems was included in the Operations Division.

⁴ At that time responsibility for defensive submarine minelaying rested with the army. It was not until January 1924 that the Council of Defence decided that submarine minelaying in Australia would be regarded as a naval liability.

war, and in September a mining policy was approved by the War Cabinet, who approved also of the immediate requisitioning of a 3,000-ton merchant ship as a minelayer. The coastal vessel *Bungaree*⁶ was taken up in October 1940 and put in hand for conversion to a minelayer with a capacity of 423 mines ready to lay. She commissioned on the 9th June 1941 under Commander Calder.⁷ In July the Admiralty ordered another 1,000 mines.

During August 1941 *Bungaree* laid the first defensive minefield at Port Moresby; and in October and November laid additional fields in Torres Strait and in passages through the Barrier Reef. By September mine production was approaching 3,000 units a year, and orders had been placed for 2,500 for the R.A.N., 1,500 for the Admiralty, and 300 and 100 respectively for New Zealand and Noumea.

It will be recalled that in the early months of the war Area Combined Headquarters (A.C.H.) were established at Melbourne and Port Moresby for coordination of operational control in joint naval, military, and air operations; more especially (at that stage) joint operations by the navy and air force in defence of sea communications. In August 1940 this organisation was amended by the establishment of a Combined Operational Intelligence Centre (C.O.I.C.), on a recommendation of the Joint Planning Committee which was ratified by the Defence Committee.⁸ The primary duty of the C.O.I.C. was "to collate and consider operational intelligence received from all sources and to submit the same with appropriate appreciations thereon". In its early stages C.O.I.C. worked as a committee of three officers representing respectively the Director of Naval Intelligence, the Director of Operations and Intelligence, Air Board, and the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence. This committee, which held its first meeting on the 16th October 1940, met daily at 10 a.m. "and at other times on the receipt of urgent operational intelligence". Otherwise its members carried on their normal duties as Intelligence officers for their respective Services. Senior of the three by rank was the air force representative, Wing Commander Malley,⁹ and he was elected chairman of the C.O.I.C. Committee, which met in the Air Intelligence room at the Victoria Barracks, Melbourne.

This arrangement had serious shortcomings from the point of view of Commander Long, Director of Naval Intelligence. At this stage the opera-

⁶ HMAS *Bungaree*, auxiliary minelayer (1937), 3,155 tons, two 4-in guns, 423 mines, 11 kts.

⁷ Cdr N. K. Calder, OBE; RAN. Entd Royal Aust Naval College 1913 (HMS *Royal Sovereign* 1917). DNO, NSW, 1939; comd HMAS *Bungaree* 1941-43; Dep Dir Naval Ordnance, Torpedo and Mines, 1943-45. Of Melbourne; b. Geelong, Vic, 17 Nov 1899.

In a report on the manufacture of mines and on the defensive mining of Australian waters, Calder subsequently wrote: "Mining had never been seriously considered by the Aust Comm Naval Board until 1940 and even then the local manufacture of mines was established purely on Admiralty initiative and for Admiralty requirements outside Australia. It may be assumed that, without this Admiralty requirement, there would have been no Australian minelaying in the 1939-45 war."

⁸ Joint Planning Committee, composed of the Deputy Chiefs of the three Services.

Defence Committee, composed of the three Chiefs of Staff and an officer of the Defence Department Secretariat, and able to consult with the Controller-General of Munitions, the Controller of Civil Aviation, and the Chairman of the Principal Supply Officers' Committee.

⁹ Gp Capt G. F. Malley, MC, AFC. (1st AIF: 1 Art Bde and 4 Sqn Aust Flying Corps.) Aviation adviser to Chinese Govt 1930-40; Dir of Combined Opnl Intell RAAF 1942-44; SO i/c Chinese Section, Aust Security Service, 1944-45. Warehouse manager; of Mosman, NSW; b. Mosman, 2 Nov 1893.

tional war as it affected the Australian mainland was that against surface raiders only. The Army directorate was "Operations and Intelligence" (D.M.O. and I), and its main duty was domestic. The Air Force directorate also was "Operations and Intelligence" (D.A.O. and I), and the intelligence side had not been developed. On the other hand the Naval Intelligence Division was long established, was a separate directorate, and was a direct branch of British Admiralty Intelligence with its world-wide network. Practically all the intelligence received by C.O.I.C. was naval in origin and importance, a great deal of it from the Admiralty dealing with the future movements of naval and other important ships and of no concern to other Services, to which, by this method of operating C.O.I.C., it became too widely and freely available. Also the situation arose of a wing commander, R.A.A.F., deciding the distribution and action necessary on naval intelligence. These were conditions which jeopardised the continued receipt of intelligence from the Admiralty.

Long protested unavailingly, and in November 1940 the Joint Planning Committee, by direction of the Defence Committee, proceeded to make a comprehensive review of the machinery required for the coordinated control of operations and intelligence. Before this review was completed however, came the German raider attack on the ships at Nauru. As a result of this, Admiral Colvin instructed Long to detail immediately three officers for operational intelligence duties; they were to have no other duties, to keep continuous watch, and to report their findings direct to Long as Director of Naval Intelligence. The officers were appointed¹ and started their duties on that day in special C.O.I.C. accommodation made available in the Naval Intelligence Division. C.O.I.C. thus became virtually a naval full-time organisation in which, for some months, the army and air force representatives continued to meet for a few minutes only each day.² By agreement with the Directors of Intelligence of the other two Services Long assumed responsibility for its organisation and administration, and in January 1941 he became, in addition to Director of Naval Intelligence, the first Director, Combined Operational Intelligence Centre.

In January 1941 the Joint Planning Committee completed its review, its proposals being broadly the establishment of a Central War Room

¹ Lt-Cdr (later Cdr) J. M. Luke, RAN. Entd RAN College 1916 (HMAS *Brisbane* 1920). Resigned 1930 at time of naval retrenchment. Joined C'wealth Public Service, and placed on naval Emergency List. Mobilised 1939 as Lt-Cdr and appointed to Naval Intell Div. Apptd COIC Dec 1940, Director COIC GHQ SWPA Aug 1944. Demobilised Aug 1946 and apptd Naval Hist Research Officer, NID, Melbourne. B. 21 Feb 1902.

Pay Lt (later Cdr) G. J. Brooksbank, VRD; RANVR. Of Melbourne; b. St Kilda, Vic, 29 Jan 1907.

Pay Sub-Lt (later Lt-Cdr) G. J. Connor, RANVR. Of Middle Brighton, Vic; b. Clifton Hill, Vic, 21 Jan 1913.

From 4 p.m. on 18 Dec 1940 until noon on 23 Aug 1945 when COIC, then in Luzon, Northern Philippines, under the directorship of Cdr Luke, completed its task, continuous watch was kept by an officer of the Australian Naval Intelligence Division. Luke and Connor served with COIC throughout.

² The RAAF appointed W Cdr Malley a full-time officer (day duty only) in COIC in Mar 1941, and the following month appointed two more full-time officers who from then on, with Malley, maintained 24-hour watches with one always on duty with the Navy. In Apr 1941 the Army detailed four officers for COIC duties. Each took a duty 24 hours of which only one hour was actually spent in COIC. For the rest of the time they carried out their normal Military Intelligence duties by day, and were available by telephone at night. The Army continued this practice until Japan entered the war in Dec 1941, when they appointed full-time watch keepers.

in Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, for the exclusive use of the Chiefs of Staff; a C.O.I.C. as adjunct thereto; the establishment of Area Combined Headquarters at Melbourne, Fremantle, Darwin and Townsville (this last-named replacing Port Moresby); and of Combined Defence Headquarters and C.O.I.C.'s for each Army Covering Force Area in which defended ports were situated, these including the four A.C.H. ports above.³ Recommended by the Defence Committee, these proposals were approved by the War Cabinet in February 1941 and (after some discussion on the desirability of the substitution of Sydney for Melbourne as A.C.H. South Eastern Area, which was decided in favour of Melbourne) were put into effect. By the middle of 1941 the general network was in operation.

Because of its geographical situation and the area it controlled (which included New Guinea, New Britain, New Ireland and the Solomons) Townsville A.C.H. became the most important outside Melbourne, and was made senior to Darwin. Wing Commander Garing,⁴ RAAF, Chief of Staff to the Air Officer Commanding North Eastern Area (Group Captain Lukis,⁵ RAAF) who had recently returned to Australia from operational service in Britain, established at Townsville an A.C.H. Operations Room on the British model which became the criterion for all other Area Combined Headquarters in Australia and New Zealand. The C.O.I.C. at Townsville was established by Lieut-Commander Luke from Melbourne C.O.I.C., and that at Darwin and Fremantle respectively by Lieutenant Brooksbank and Pay Sub-Lieutenant Ryan,⁶ both of whom had experience in C.O.I.C. Melbourne.

The transfer of A.C.H. North Eastern Area from Port Moresby to Townsville entailed a corresponding move of the coastwatcher centre from Papua to the Queensland base; the move being accompanied by some administrative changes. It will be recalled that Lieut-Commander Feldt was in 1939 appointed Staff Officer (Intelligence) Port Moresby with the primary task of filling the intelligence gaps in the northern screen by completing and administering the coastwatching organisation in the islands. Since his function was the collection and distribution of intelligence his place was at A.C.H. By this time the chain of coastwatchers, equipped where necessary with telerradios and instructed in their duties, was established throughout the islands extending as far eastward as the New

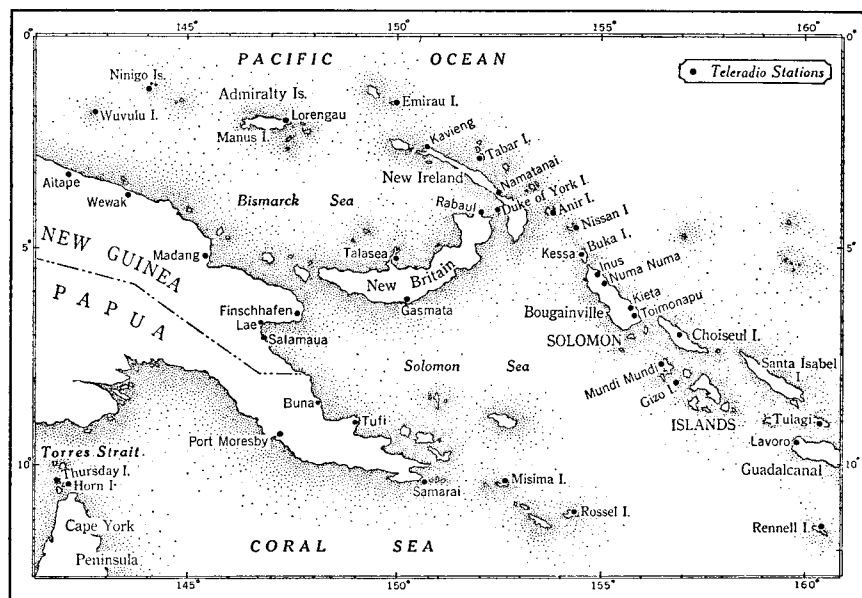
³ Combined Defence Headquarters were recommended at Fremantle, Darwin, Adelaide, Newcastle, Melbourne, Sydney, Hobart, Thursday Island, Townsville, Brisbane, and Port Moresby. The function of the Central War Room was the control of operations on the highest military plane by direct meetings between the Chiefs of Staff or their deputies; that of COIC was the making of intelligence appreciations on strategical and important questions for the Chiefs of Staff, and the distribution of urgent intelligence to appropriate authorities. The function of the Area Combined Headquarters was to ensure naval and air cooperation in trade defence in the focal areas, i.e. for South West Australia at Fremantle, South East Australia at Melbourne, North East Australia at Townsville and North West Australia at Darwin. The object of Combined Defence Headquarters was to coordinate the operations of the naval, military and air forces allotted for the defence of areas including a defended port.

⁴ Air Cmdre W. H. Garing, CBE, DFC. SASO N Cd and NE Area, RAAF, 1941-42; comd 9 Op Gp 1942-43, 1 OTU 1943-44; Dir Tactics and Opnl Reqmnts 1944-45. Regular airman; of Melbourne; b. Corryong, Vic, 26 Jul 1910.

⁵ Air Cmdre F. W. F. Lukis, CBE. (1st AIF: 10 LH Regt and 1 Sqn Aust Flying Corps.) AOC NE Area, RAAF, 1941-42; Air Memb for Personnel 1942-43; comd 9 Op Gp (later Northern Cd) 1943-45. Regular airman; of South Yarra, Vic; b. Balinjup, WA, 27 Jul 1896.

⁶ Lt J. H. P. Ryan, RANVR. Of Brisbane; b. Townsville, Qld, 10 Jul 1914.

Hebrides. Under the control of Feldt, general supervision over the island coastwatchers was exercised by civil officers of the administrations; but about the middle of 1941 the Director of Naval Intelligence decided to appoint Intelligence officers to key points since, should an emergency arise, the civil officers of the administrations would have their hands full with their own affairs. Staff Officers (Intelligence) were therefore appointed



Northern Screen Coastwatcher Stations

to Rabaul, Port Moresby, Thursday Island, Tulagi, and Vila, each with his network of coastwatchers.⁷ So far as could be done, this branch of Naval Intelligence (under the immediate supervision from Townsville of Feldt with the new title of Supervising Intelligence Officer, North Eastern Area) was fully grown and bearing fruit before Japan entered the war. It was an organisation which ensured that any intruder through the island screen, whether by sea or air, would be reported promptly both to local forces and to the distant high command. Thus during 1941 the Australian machinery for the conducting of war in the Pacific was established. It was controlled from the Central War Room in Melbourne, whence radiated the channels of communication through the C.O.I.C's, the A.C.H's, and the Combined Defence Headquarters, to the confines of the Australian

⁷ Rabaul, Lt Mackenzie, RAN; Port Moresby, Sub-Lt Gill, RANVR; Thursday Island, Lt-Cdr Crawford, RANR; Tulagi, Sub-Lt Macfarlan, RANVR; Vila, Lt Bullock, RANVR.
 Lt-Cdr H. A. Mackenzie, RAN. (HMS *Glorious* 1917-18.) DSIO, NE Area, 1943-45. Planter and trader in New Guinea; b. Braidwood, NSW, 16 Aug 1899. Died, as result of accident, 19 Sep 1948.

Lt J. C. H. Gill, RANVR. Of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 12 Feb 1916.

Lt-Cdr H. A. G. Crawford, VRD; RANR. Of New Farm, Qld; b. Brisbane, 29 Nov 1908.

Lt-Cdr D. S. Macfarlan, RANVR. Of Melbourne; b. Aberdeen, Scotland, 12 Mar 1908.

Lt H. W. Bullock, RANVR. Of Sydney; b. Toowoomba, Qld, 10 Feb 1916.

defence area. Inwards these channels carried intelligence and information; and outwards such operational orders based thereon as were consonant with the nation's limited material resources to meet any possible aggression.

III

In their joint planning to meet the possibilities of a Far Eastern war Australia, New Zealand, Britain, the United States and the Netherlands East Indies, were handicapped by lack of any definite knowledge regarding if and when the United States would enter such a war. In December 1940 the Commonwealth Government asked Britain whether, in view of the improved naval situation in the Mediterranean, and the increase in the number of capital ships, the possibility of basing three or four capital ships on Singapore could be considered. Mr Churchill, in a reply on the 23rd of the month, gave his opinion that the danger of Japan going to war with Britain had receded, and went on to detail reasons (increase in German capital ship strength, the appearance of a German battleship raider in the Atlantic, the possibility of undamaged portions of the French fleet being betrayed to Germany) why it was not possible to divert capital ships to Singapore.

For all these reasons we are at the fullest naval strain I have seen either in this or the former war. The only way in which a naval squadron could be found for Singapore would be by ruining the Mediterranean situation. This I am sure you would not wish us to do unless or until the Japanese danger becomes far more menacing than at present.

Mr Churchill went on to say that he was

persuaded that if Japan should enter the war the United States will come in on our side which will put the naval boot very much on the other leg, and be a deliverance from many perils.

The President of the United States, whatever his personal inclinations, was by no means certain of this. Mr Roosevelt, in his talks with his Foreign Secretary, found that Mr Hull

would never envisage the tough answer to the problem that would have to be faced if Japan attacked, for instance, either Singapore or the Netherlands East Indies. The President felt that it was a weakness in our policy that we could not be specific on that point.⁸

Though Mr Churchill spoke with such confidence to the Australian Government in December 1940, two months later, when Mr Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's personal envoy, was in London,

Eden, the Foreign Minister, asked me repeatedly what our country would do if Japan attacked Singapore or the Dutch, saying it was essential to their policy to know. Of course, it was perfectly clear that neither the President nor Hull could give an adequate answer to the British on that point because the declaration of war is up to Congress, and the isolationists, and, indeed, a great part of the American people, would not be interested in a war in the Far East merely because Japan attacked the Dutch.⁹

⁸ Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (1948), p. 428.

⁹ Quoted by Sumner Welles in *Seven Major Decisions* (1951), pp. 97-8.

It was an uncertainty that was to continue until Japan attacked Pearl Harbour at the end of the year. But, on the military side, such joint discussions were held and plans made as were possible in the circumstances.

The British Chiefs of Staff maintained that the security of Singapore and of Indian Ocean communications was the main defence of the whole British Commonwealth in the Far East. In January 1941 the British Government asked Australia and New Zealand to modify their naval dispositions proposed in the report of the October 1940 Singapore Conference. It was suggested that instead of Australian and New Zealand forces being concentrated in the Tasman Sea area and south-western Australia in the event of war with Japan, a proportion should be used in defence of Indian Ocean communications. In a reply in February the Australian Government pointed out that it was greatly concerned as to the naval strength which would be available in the Indian Ocean, and lacked information as to the existing position "and any action proposed to augment it in the event of hostilities with Japan". As to the disposition of Australian and New Zealand naval forces the Australian Government, on the advice of its Chiefs of Staff, expressed the view that the south-west Pacific area must be considered as a whole, irrespective of station limits; that in the event of war the Japanese would aim at maintaining a cruiser force (possibly with heavy cover) in the Tasman Sea area to cut Australian communications across the Pacific; that the minimum naval forces to counter such a threat could be provided only by the return of all Australian and New Zealand ships overseas; and that they should be disposed mainly in the Tasman Sea area "at any rate until U.S.A. has shown her hand".

This view was re-affirmed in a combined Far Eastern appreciation of the Australian Chiefs of Staff which was discussed in their presence by the War Cabinet on the 14th February 1941. Also present at this discussion was the British Commander-in-Chief in the Far East, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, who visited Australia from 8th to 18th February as a preliminary to Anglo-Dutch-Australian staff conversations at Singapore, which had been arranged for later in the month. On the day of the War Cabinet meeting the Acting Prime Minister (Mr Fadden) and Opposition leaders issued a joint warning to Australia that it was "the considered opinion of the Advisory War Council that the war has moved to a new stage involving the utmost gravity". This arose from various indications² pointing to aggressive action by the Japanese in the near future which caused the British Chiefs of Staff on the 12th February to warn naval Commanders-in-Chief; the Commanders-in-Chief in the Far

² On 11 Feb the Australian Minister at Tokyo told the Government that the British Embassy there regarded the situation so seriously that the staff had been instructed to be ready for emergency. On the same day the Dominions Office itemised to the Australian Government as "straws in the wind": (a) landing of Japanese troops on the mainland near Hong Kong; (b) increase of Japanese troops from 6,000 to 13,000 in the Tonking area; (c) presence of Japanese warships in the Hainan area and off the coast of Indo-China; (d) the recent mining of the Suez Canal; (e) Japanese efforts with German assistance to reach an agreement with Russia.

East, Middle East and India; and the Air Officer Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, to adopt increased vigilance and take unobtrusive precautions against possible attack.

However Brooke-Popham, at the meeting of the War Cabinet, spoke in confident tones of Britain's ability to defend her Far Eastern possessions if the Japanese attacked. Hong Kong, he said, could in his opinion defend itself for at least four months at a minimum. Plans for Singapore were based on the assumption that it could defend itself for six months until capital ships could arrive to relieve it, but it would probably be possible to hold on for nine months, and before he left England Mr Churchill had assured him that "we will not let Singapore fall". The supreme need at Singapore was munitions and more aircraft. He anticipated that any Japanese attack on Singapore would be by infiltration from Thailand and a gradual move down the Kra Isthmus before declaring war. For this reason it would help him if a decision could be reached as to what action by Japan would constitute a *casus belli*.

The conclusions reached and policy outlined in the Chiefs of Staff appreciation (a summary of which was cabled to the United Kingdom and the British authorities in the Far East) were that the security of Australia and New Zealand, the Singapore Base and Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies, and the Indian Ocean and Pacific sea routes, were Australia's vital interests, and that their defence formed one strategic problem. The responsibility of each government concerned for the defence of its own and common interests must, however, be arranged and clearly defined, and a practical scheme worked out for the reinforcement of any threatened point with forces drawn from the strategic area as a whole. The most likely course of Japanese action was seen as an attack on Malaya, possibly as the first step towards a major attack on Australia. The main requirement in the Far East being a capital ship fleet, the retention of Singapore Base was vital; and the security of Singapore and of Australia was closely bound up with that of the Netherlands East Indies. Plans must therefore provide for coordination with and assistance for the Dutch. The security of the south-west Pacific was essential for the passage of an American fleet and its operation in the East Indies area if America intervened. In the absence of a British fleet the defence of our Far Eastern interests could be secured by the arrival of an American fleet; but in the absence of either, the defence of territory must depend primarily on the local forces in each area. As to policy, naval and air forces should be used to forestall the establishment of enemy naval and air bases within striking distance of vital points, while adequate forces were retained for local defence and the security of sea communications. The main army forces in each allotted area should provide final opposition against invasion, and garrison outlying bases to ensure the continued operations of naval and air forces. Acting on this last-mentioned recommendation the War Cabinet decided in February upon the military reinforcement of the Darwin, Port Moresby, Thursday Island and Rabaul areas, and the installation of two additional

6-inch coast defence guns each at Darwin and Rabaul, and the provision of two for the Free French at Noumea. Also, on the 27th February, the War Cabinet directed that both the Central War Room and the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre were to be manned on a full-time basis—a direction which, as stated above, had been anticipated by the navy so far as C.O.I.C. was concerned.

Broadly, the Chiefs of Staff appreciation formed the basis of the Anglo-Dutch-Australian conference, which assembled at Singapore under the presidency of Brooke-Popham on the 22nd February, and sat until the 25th. Naval representatives were Vice-Admiral Layton, Commander-in-Chief, China Station; Admiral Staveren, Chief of the Naval Staff Netherlands East Indies; and Rear-Admiral Crace, Rear-Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron, as leader of the Australian and New Zealand delegation.³ Present as observers were Captain Archer Allen, U.S.N., and Captain Purnell, U.S.N., Chief of Staff of the United States Asiatic Fleet.

The agreement reached by the conference (subject to ratification by the respective governments and involving no political commitments) was for mutual assistance in the event of Japanese attack. Because of the uncertainty of America's attitude, planning was on the basis of Anglo-Dutch-Australian action without active American cooperation. It was considered that an invasion of Australia and New Zealand could be ruled out initially, and that the probable Japanese course would be an attack on Singapore via Indo-China and Thailand; but that the possibility of an alternative move against Borneo and the Netherlands East Indies must be taken into account. In the event of an attack on Singapore the Dutch would assist with air support and the operation of submarines in the South China Sea; Australia would help with the provision of army units, and an air striking force at Darwin, to reinforce Ambon and Koepang. In the event of the attack being against Borneo and the Netherlands East Indies the above Australian support proposed for Singapore would assist in making the passage of the northern line of Dutch possessions as difficult as possible.

In either instance the defence of sea communications would be of major importance, and it was deemed essential to have capital ship cover for troop convoys in the Indian Ocean; cruiser escort for troops and trade convoys in the Indian Ocean, Australian and New Zealand waters; evasive routing for merchant ships in the Pacific outside focal areas, and in the Southern Ocean (Australia-Cape route); and air reconnaissance and striking forces in focal areas.

³ Crace was accompanied by his SO (O and I) (Lt-Cdr Oldham, who was appointed to that position from Navy Office in May 1940); the Director of Signals and Communications (Cdr Newman); and Cdr Kennedy, from the Operations Division, Navy Office. On 24 Feb a conference of RN, RAN, and NEI signals officers met in Singapore to discuss combined communications procedure.

Cdr V. E. Kennedy, OBE; RAN. Ent RAN College 1915 (HMS *Tiger* 1919). Aust Fleet Air Arm pilot 1925. Aust NLO to C-in-C Royal Netherlands Navy Feb 1941 to Mar 1942. SO (Ops) Fremantle 1942-44. Comd HMAS's *Ladava* (Milne Bay) 1944, *Leeuwin* (Fremantle) 1945. Of Melbourne; b. Bendigo, Vic, 3 Feb 1901.

The British naval forces⁴ which would become available for the defence of communications in the Indian Ocean were one battle cruiser; two aircraft carriers; one 8-inch gun and eleven 6-inch gun cruisers and five armed merchant cruisers; destroyers and small craft; with possibly (dependent on the raider situation in the South Atlantic) an additional aircraft carrier and three 8-inch gun cruisers. The Dutch would contribute two 6-inch gun cruisers or one cruiser and two destroyers. Australian and New Zealand forces in the south-west Pacific would comprise (with the return of their ships from overseas) two 8-inch gun and six 6-inch gun cruisers, three armed merchant cruisers, five destroyers, and smaller vessels.

The conference agreed on what Japanese actions should necessitate active military action by the Allies. These were: a direct act of war by Japanese armed forces against British, Dutch, Australian or New Zealand territory or mandated territory; the movement of Japanese forces into any part of Thailand west of Bangkok or south of the Kra Isthmus; the movement of a large number of Japanese warships or escorted merchant ship convoys into the Gulf of Siam; the movement of Japanese forces into Timor, New Caledonia or the Loyalty Islands close to the east; a Japanese attack on the Philippines.

In general the Australian War Cabinet approved the findings of the conference. Though it agreed with a recommendation of the conference that the return of the Australian and New Zealand ships serving overseas should be deferred until the Japanese threat became more of a reality in the Far East, it expressed the view that capital ship cover for troop convoys in the Indian Ocean in the event of war with Japan was insufficient, and that capital ship escort should be provided. It also expressed great concern at the failure of the conference to produce a complete naval plan for the Far East. Representations were made to the United Kingdom on both these points.

Meanwhile, across the Pacific, Anglo-American staff conversations had opened in Washington on the 29th January.⁵ Their object was to determine how best British and American forces could be disposed and employed to defeat the Axis powers "should the United States be compelled to resort to war". Two important points emerged from these conversations. The first and major one incorporated the basic strategic decision of the war—that the Atlantic and European area was considered to be the decisive

⁴ In a telegram of 24 Feb, while the conference was sitting, the Admiralty stated that "in the event of war in the Far East in the near future no major redistribution of force is intended other than move of one battle cruiser, one aircraft carrier and one cruiser from Gibraltar to Indian Ocean and return of those Dominion cruisers now serving with Imperial forces to their Dominions". The Admiralty went on ("to assist in planning") to forecast the total forces likely to be available, and added: "You will appreciate that we are forecasting for hypothetical date and it cannot be guaranteed above named units will actually be available when time comes. Numbers and types as above should however be used as a basis for planning. Question of relief of force from Gibraltar and of Dominion numbers drawn from other stations will be dealt with when situation arises."

⁵ British military representatives were: Rear-Adm R. M. Bellairs, RN, Rear-Adm V. H. Danckwerts, RN, Major-Gen E. L. Morris, Air Vice-Marshal J. C. Slessor and Capt A. W. Clarke, RN. Representatives of Canada, Australia and New Zealand were in the British delegation but were not present at joint meetings.

theatre.⁶ The other was the divergence of British and American views as to the value of Singapore. The British believed that Singapore (as the base of a battle fleet) was essential to the security of the Malay Barrier and Indian Ocean communications, and pressed the Americans to base there a proportion of the Pacific Fleet.⁷ This the Americans refused to do on the grounds that they doubted Singapore's value and that to detach warships to Singapore or to reinforce their Asiatic Fleet at the expense of the Pacific Fleet would merely offer the Japanese an opportunity to defeat the U.S. Navy in detail. Admiral Colvin, summarising the American views for the War Cabinet, said that

Singapore, while very important, was not in the U.S. view absolutely vital, and its loss, while undesirable, could be accepted. This view was not accepted by the British Delegation at Washington.

As between Great Britain and the United States at Washington

It was agreed that for Great Britain it was fundamental that Singapore be held; for the United States it was fundamental that the Pacific Fleet be held intact.⁸

Briefly, as a result of the Washington talks, it was arranged that the defence of the Pacific Ocean area and the strategic direction of their own and British forces there would be a United States responsibility in the event of them entering the war. United States intentions were to use the United States navy principally in the Atlantic, reinforcing their Atlantic Fleet from the Pacific Fleet if necessary. Sufficient strength would be based on Hawaii, however, to protect the West American seaboard and Pacific communications; operate offensively against Japanese mandated islands and sea communications; and support British naval forces in the South Pacific. It was not intended to reinforce the U.S. Asiatic Fleet⁹ which, under its Commander-in-Chief, Admiral T. C. Hart, was based on the Philippines, and it was anticipated that those islands would not be able to hold out very long against determined Japanese attack. The United States Navy was prepared to provide sufficient capital ships for the Atlantic and for Gibraltar as would permit the release of British capital ships from those areas to reinforce the Far East.¹

With the Pacific Ocean an undivided American responsibility there was no need for joint planning there. The Washington talks however resulted in an agreement (subject to Dutch approval) regarding the Far

⁶ There can be no question of the rightness of this decision. When it was reached the Pacific area was still in a state of uneasy peace, and it was not beyond possibility that the Japanese might be dissuaded from attack. But in any eventuality they could not be as dangerous enemies as the Germans, with whom in the field of science they were not to be compared. There were good grounds for the apprehension that, given time, the Germans might produce irresistible "secret" weapons.

⁷ On 1 Feb 1941 the US Fleet was renamed the Pacific Fleet.

⁸ Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific* (1948), p. 50, quoting from Minutes of the Washington staff conversations, 10 Feb 1941.

⁹ Of one 8-inch gun cruiser, two 6-inch gun cruisers, 13 destroyers and 29 submarines. (Actually submarines of the Asiatic Fleet were gradually increased to that number during the last few months of 1941.)

¹ Colvin's summary for the War Cabinet. Morison, *Rising Sun in the Pacific*, p. 51, says: "The British agreed, in case of war with Japan, to send at least six capital ships to defend Singapore if the United States Navy would assist the Royal Navy in watching the Mediterranean. That arrangement was in the course of being carried out when the surprise attack on Pearl Harbour altered everything."

East, for collaboration in the formation of strategic plans. It was agreed that the British Commander-in-Chief, China, should be responsible for the strategic direction of the naval forces of the three powers, except that the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Asiatic Fleet, would be responsible for naval defence of the Philippines. Part of the Asiatic Fleet would, however, come under the command of the Commander-in-Chief, China, immediately on the outbreak of war, and the remainder under his strategic direction when Manila became untenable.

As a result of the Washington talks, an American-Dutch-British Commonwealth Conference was held at Singapore from 21st to 26th April 1941 to formulate plans for a war in the Far East between Germany, Italy and Japan on the one hand, and the British Commonwealth and its allies, including the United States, on the other. Brooke-Popham presided, and the conference was attended by Admiral Layton; the Chief of the General Staff, Netherlands East Indies, Major-General ter Poorten; Captain Purnell U.S.N. representing Admiral Hart; and an Australian delegation led by Admiral Colvin and consisting of his Naval Secretary, Pay-Captain Foley;² the Director of Plans, Navy Office, Commander Nichols;³ and Colonel Rourke⁴ and Group Captain Bladin⁵ as Army and Air advisers respectively. The Australian delegation reached Singapore in H.M.A.S. *Sydney* on the 19th April, and sailed for Australia on the 30th in H.M.A.S. *Australia*.

Plans formulated were based on the decisions reached at the Anglo-Dutch-Australian Conference in February, and the Washington talks; but the divergence between British and American views was at that stage an insuperable obstacle to reaching a workable war plan for the Far East. The British held their ground as to the importance of Singapore, and Brooke-Popham maintained the optimistic view he had expressed to the Australian War Cabinet in January. Plans for the employment of naval forces were in two phases—from the outbreak of war with Japan until the arrival of the British capital ship fleet at Singapore, and operations subsequent to this. In phase 1, the forces would be used for local defence of bases; in defence of vital sea communications (mainly Indian Ocean); and in attack on Japanese sea communications. In phase 2, with the arrival of a British capital ship fleet operating from Singapore, the Allied naval strength should be superior to that of the Japanese, enabling the associated powers to gain the initiative. Should it (considered an unlikely event) prove impossible for the British fleet to operate from Singapore, it would operate from Indian Ocean bases, with the object of securing the vital sea

² Captain (S) J. B. Foley, CBE; RAN. Joined RAN as Pay-Midshipman, 1915. (HMAS *Australia* 1915.) Sec 1st NM, ACNB, 1931-44; NLO London, 1944-48, 1951-55; Admin Asst to 2nd NM, 1948-51; Director-General Supply and Secretariat Branch Navy Dept; and Chief Naval Judge Advocate and Director of Administrative Planning since 1955. Of Melbourne; b. Ballarat, Vic, 24 Jun 1896.

³ Capt R. F. Nichols, RN. (HMS *Erin* 1917-19.) Dir of Plans RAN 1940-42; Dep Ch of Naval Staff RAN 1942-43; comd HMS's *Caledon* 1943-44, *Ready* 1945. B. 9 Sep 1900.

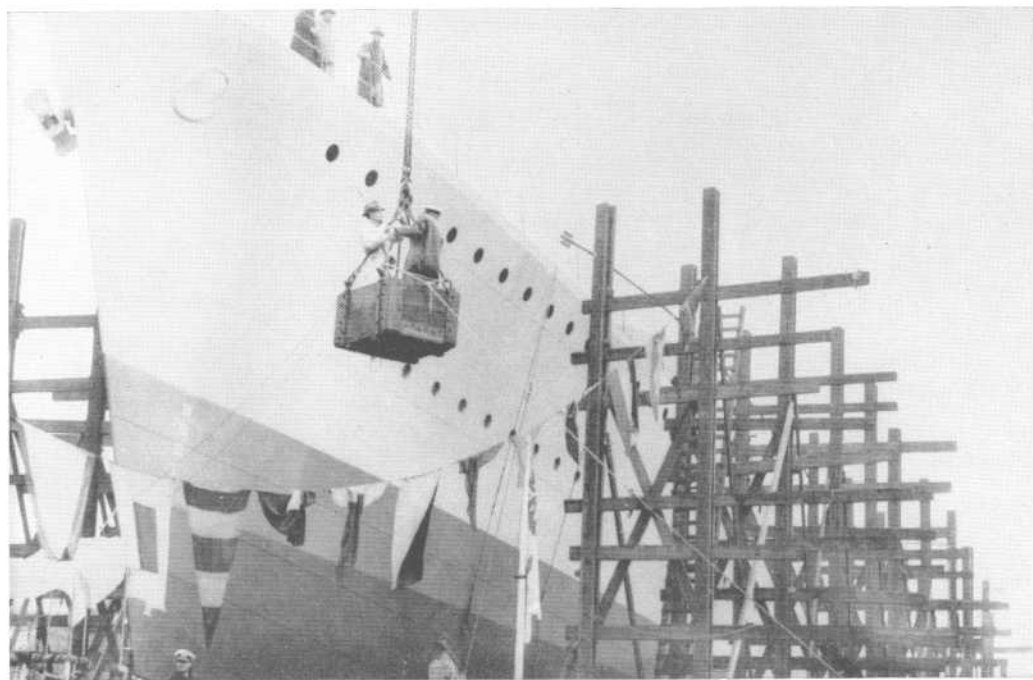
⁴ Brig H. G. Rourke, MC. (1st AIF: Major 7 Fd Arty Bde.) GSO1 8 Aust Div 1940-41; BGS I Corps 1942; Mil Asst to Aust representative in UK War Cabinet 1943-45. Regular soldier; of Sydney; b. Ashfield, NSW, 26 Jun 1896.

⁵ AVM F. M. Bladin, CB, CBE. Director of Ops and Intell RAAF 1940-41; AOC Southern Area 1941, N-W Area 1942-43; SASO 38 Gp RAF 1943-44; Dep CAS RAAF 1945; C of S BCOF, Japan, 1946-47. Regular airman; of Kew, Vic; b. Korumburra, Vic, 26 Aug 1898.



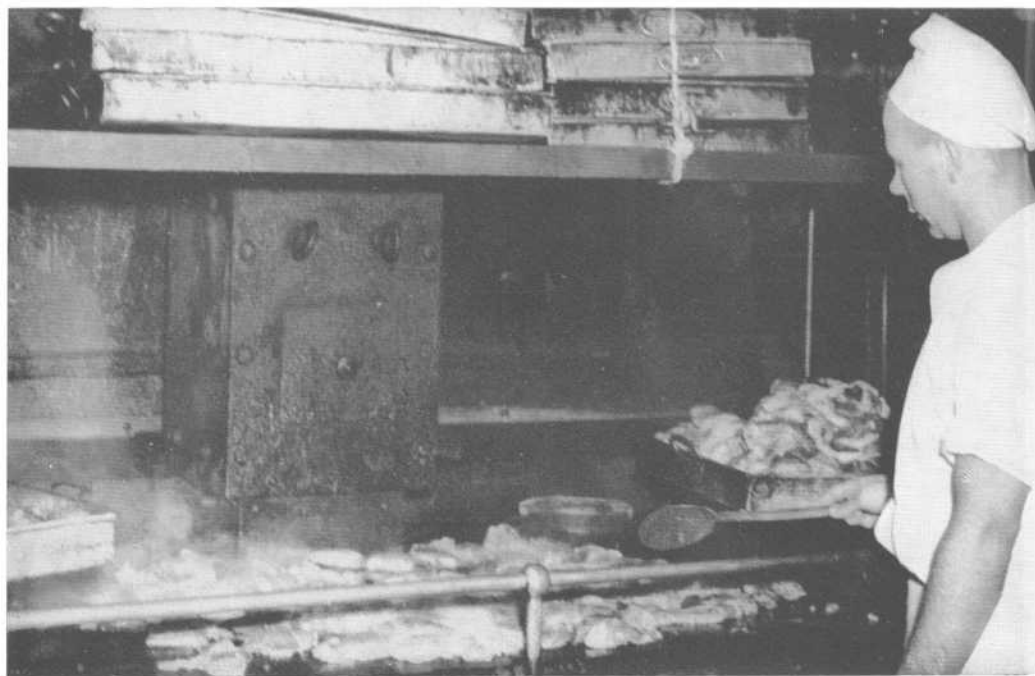
(R.A.N. Historical Section)

German Mine on Deck of H.M.A.S. *Uki*, 19th November 1941, off Montague Island.



(Department of Information)

Launching of H.M.A.S. *Arunta* at Cockatoo Island Dockyard, 30th November 1940.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Scene in Galley of H.M.A.S. Sydney.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Scene in Engine Room of a Cruiser.

communications in that ocean and Australian and New Zealand areas; would dispute any further advance by the enemy to the southward or westward; and if possible relieve pressure on Malaya by operations in the Malacca Strait and against any enemy activities on the west coast of Malaya. The Dutch agreed with this concept, and undertook to employ their naval forces in phase 1 primarily for the defence of the Netherlands East Indies and the narrow passages between the islands, but to make one cruiser, two destroyers, and two submarines available to operate under British control in defence of sea communications. Australia also agreed, and approved of a new Australian naval commitment—the operation of one Australian 6-inch gun cruiser in North Australian waters to escort troop convoys to Ambon, Koepang, and Singapore, and then to be at the disposition of Commander-in-Chief, China. (This resulted from the agreement reached at the Anglo-Dutch-Australian conference in February, to station Australian military and air forces in the Netherlands East Indies, thus being outside the area of Australian naval operational control.)

Captain Purnell, the American representative, dissented from this concept of operations. He held that over-emphasis on escort-of-convoy would deprive naval striking forces of the strength to break up Japanese amphibious and fleet attacks; and that if the United States were to assist in the defence of the Malay Barrier the best strategy would be an attack by the Pacific Fleet on the Marshall Islands, thus forcing the Japanese to shift weight to the north and east.⁶ The Singapore conference thus dissolved on the 27th April having agreed upon a combined operating plan of local defence forces only in the event of war with Japan. On the 3rd July the United States Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Stark and General Marshall, rejected the conclusions and resolutions of the Singapore conference “for several reasons, but mainly because the whole thing pivoted on Singapore. They notified the British Chiefs of Staff that an earlier permission, given to Admiral Hart to operate his Fleet under British strategic directions, was revoked.”⁷ They did, however, agree to the recommendations made by the conference, which were in line with those of the earlier Anglo-Dutch-Australian conference, as to the Japanese moves which should be considered to constitute a *casus belli*; and they recommended their acceptance to President Roosevelt.

The main conference at Singapore was followed by a further meeting to clear up outstanding points arising out of the Anglo-Dutch-Australian talks of February. In the event, those talks resulted in the only forward planning for combined operations in the Far East in anticipation of a Japanese attack.

Apart from the various conferences, machinery was gradually set up for the closer interchange of information between the navies of the prospective allies. In 1940 political representation between Australia and the United States was established on the ambassadorial level, and legations were opened in Canberra and Washington respectively. Early the following

⁶ Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific*, p. 55.

⁷ Morison, *ibid.* p. 55.

year naval attachés were appointed, Commander Burrell to Washington and Commander Causey, U.S.N., to Canberra.⁸ At the same time the U.S. Navy appointed an observer, Commander Collins, to Darwin. In February 1941 the R.A.N. and the Royal Netherlands Navy exchanged liaison officers. Commander Kennedy, R.A.N., was appointed to the staff of Admiral Helfrich, the Commander-in-Chief R.N.N., at Batavia; and Commander Salm, R.N.N., was appointed to Navy Office, Melbourne. As a result of the April conference at Singapore the proposal was made to the Admiralty that Captain Collins, R.A.N., be appointed to the staff of the Commander-in-Chief, China. This was agreed to, and he assumed duty at Singapore, as Assistant Chief of Staff to Admiral Layton for combined planning operations, on the 17th June 1941.

In January 1941 general permission for the use of Australian and mandated territorial waters for the fuelling of Dutch warships was granted by the Australian Government. The matter originated in October 1940, when the Dutch decided to institute a naval patrol between the meridians of 130 and 180 degrees east to protect Dutch merchant ships crossing the Pacific, and sought refuelling bases. It was first approved that a Dutch tanker could be stationed at Port Moresby. Later the Department of External Affairs passed the opinion that the alliance between the Netherlands and British Commonwealth Governments in the prosecution of the war *ipso facto* determined all questions of international law, and it was purely a matter of mutual agreement as to the use of each other's territories and resources. At various times thereafter during 1941 Dutch tankers were at Port Moresby and Rabaul to refuel the patrolling and escorting cruisers *Tromp* and *Java*,⁹ and these two ships also became familiar if occasional visitors at Queensland ports.

In March 1941 four American cruisers and a destroyer squadron visited Australia and New Zealand on a flag-showing cruise. The first intimation was a cablegram to the Department of External Affairs stating that the ships had left Samoa and that it was proposed that the Australian detachment of two cruisers and five destroyers¹ under Rear-Admiral Newton

⁸ Burrell, from Navy Office, was in Washington only a short period before being appointed to command HMAS *Norman*. Subsequent wartime appointments to Washington were: Cdrs D. H. Harries (Apr 1941 to Oct 1942); A. S. Rosenthal (Oct 1942 to Nov 1944); S. H. K. Spurgeon (Nov 1944 to Dec 1948).

Rear-Adm D. H. Harries, CBE; RAN. Ent RAN College 1917 (HMS *Conqueror* 1921). Comd HMS *Seagull* 1939-40; HMS *Niger* 1940; NA Washington 1941-42; Exec Offr HMAS *Shropshire* 1942-44; DCNS Navy Office 1944-45. Of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 27 Jun 1903.

Capt S. H. K. Spurgeon, DSO, OBE; RAN. Ent RAN College 1916 (HMAS *Brisbane* 1920). Comd HMS *Echo* 1939-40, and while in this ship was recipient of first Australian decoration of the war, for anti-submarine activities. Comd HMAS *Stuart* 1942-43; Dir Anti-Sub Warfare, Navy Office, 1943-44; NA Washington 1944-48. Of Melbourne; b. Gosport, Hants, Eng, 15 May 1902.

Commander Lewis D. Causey, USN, was NA Melbourne until 1944 when he was succeeded by Cdr Malcolm Mackenzie USNR.

⁹ *Tromp*, Dutch cruiser (1940), 3,350 tons, six 5.9-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 33 kts.

Java, Dutch cruiser (1925), 6,670 tons, ten 5.9-in guns, 31 kts; torpedoed in Battle of Java Sea, 27 Feb 1942.

¹ *Chicago*, US cruiser (1931), 9,300 tons, nine 8-in guns, 32.7 kts; sunk at the Battle of Rennell Island, 30 Jan 1943.

Portland, US cruiser (1933), 9,800 tons, nine 8-in guns, 32.7 kts.

Clark, US flotilla leader (1937), 1,805 tons, eight 5-in guns, eight 21-in torp tubes, 37 kts.

Cassin, *Conyngham*, *Downes* and *Reld*, US destroyers (1937), 1,500 tons, five 5-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 36.5 kts; *Cassin* and *Downes* lost in Jap attack on Pearl Harbour, 7 Dec 1941.

flying his flag in *Chicago*, should visit Sydney from 20th to 23rd March and Brisbane from 25th to 28th. It was requested that advance arrangements be kept as secret as possible as it was desired that the ships should "pop up"² unexpectedly at various places. The visit was a great success; and the sailors created a good impression in both ports by their appearance and behaviour. *Chicago*, in a massive and cumbersome square framework she carried on her mainmast, gave those in the R.A.N. who had not been off the Australia Station, their first view of radar equipment. The squadron sailed from Brisbane for an unknown destination on the 28th March, and "popped up" again at Suva on the 1st April before finally vanishing in the Pacific vastness. United States cruisers made one more peacetime visit to Australia in 1941. In August the *Northampton* (flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Taffinder) and *Salt Lake City*³ spent five days at Brisbane before returning eastward via Port Moresby and Rabaul.

The occasion of the first American cruiser visit coincided with a practical illustration of Dutch cooperation with Australia when the world's largest motor ship, the Dutch *Oranje* (19,850 tons) reached Sydney on the 31st March. *Oranje* made her maiden voyage just before the outbreak of war in 1939. In February 1941 she was in Batavia when the Netherlands Government offered to equip and operate her as a hospital ship between Australia and the Middle East. The offer was accepted. Conversion at Dutch expense was undertaken at Sydney, and on the 1st July 1941 *Oranje* sailed from that port on her first voyage to Suez. She was Australia's second hospital ship. In May 1940 the Australian coastal vessel *Manunda* (9,115 tons) was requisitioned and converted, and sailed from Sydney on her maiden voyage to the Middle East in October of that year. A third was acquired in May 1941, when the Australian *Wanganella* (9,576 tons) was taken up and equipped. She sailed from Sydney at the end of August 1941 on her first hospital ship voyage.

Throughout 1941 the passage of the "US" convoys carrying Australian and New Zealand troops across the Indian Ocean to the Middle East continued. In addition, with the sailing of the first of the series in this year (US.9) there started the regular transport of Australian troops to Singapore. Early in December 1940 the Australian Government, concerned regarding the defence of Malaya, told the British Government that it would be willing to send to Malaya, as a temporary expedient and to complete its training there, a brigade group and the necessary maintenance troops with a modified scale of equipment. This offer was accepted by the British Government and arrangements were made for the 22nd Infantry Brigade and attached troops to embark for Malaya early in

² President Roosevelt told Admiral Stark he wished to send more ships on similar cruises "to keep them popping up here and there, to keep the Japs guessing"—a suggestion which did not appeal to the US Chief of Naval Operations. Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific*, p. 56.

³ *Northampton*, US cruiser (1930), 9,050 tons, nine 8-in guns, 32.7 kts; torpedoed in Battle of Tassafaronga, 30 Nov 1942.
Salt Lake City, US cruiser (1929), 9,100 tons, ten 8-in guns, 32.7 kts.

February.⁴ This they did, and sailed from Sydney, a total of 5,718, in the transport *Queen Mary* in convoy US.9 on the 4th February 1941. Other ships in the convoy, destined for the Middle East, were *Aquitania* and *Nieuw Amsterdam* (this last-named carrying New Zealand troops) from Sydney, and *Mauretania* from Melbourne. The convoy was escorted to Fremantle by *Hobart*; and sailed from that port escorted by *Canberra* on 12th February. Four days later, some 200 miles south-west of Sunda Strait, the convoy was met by H.M.S. *Durban* from Singapore, and *Queen Mary* was detached and escorted by the British cruiser to that port, where they arrived on the 18th February. The remainder of the convoy proceeded towards Bombay, and in a position west of Colombo on the 20th February *Canberra* handed over escort to the New Zealand cruiser *Leander*, and herself proceeded to Colombo. *Leander* and the convoy reached Bombay on the 22nd February.

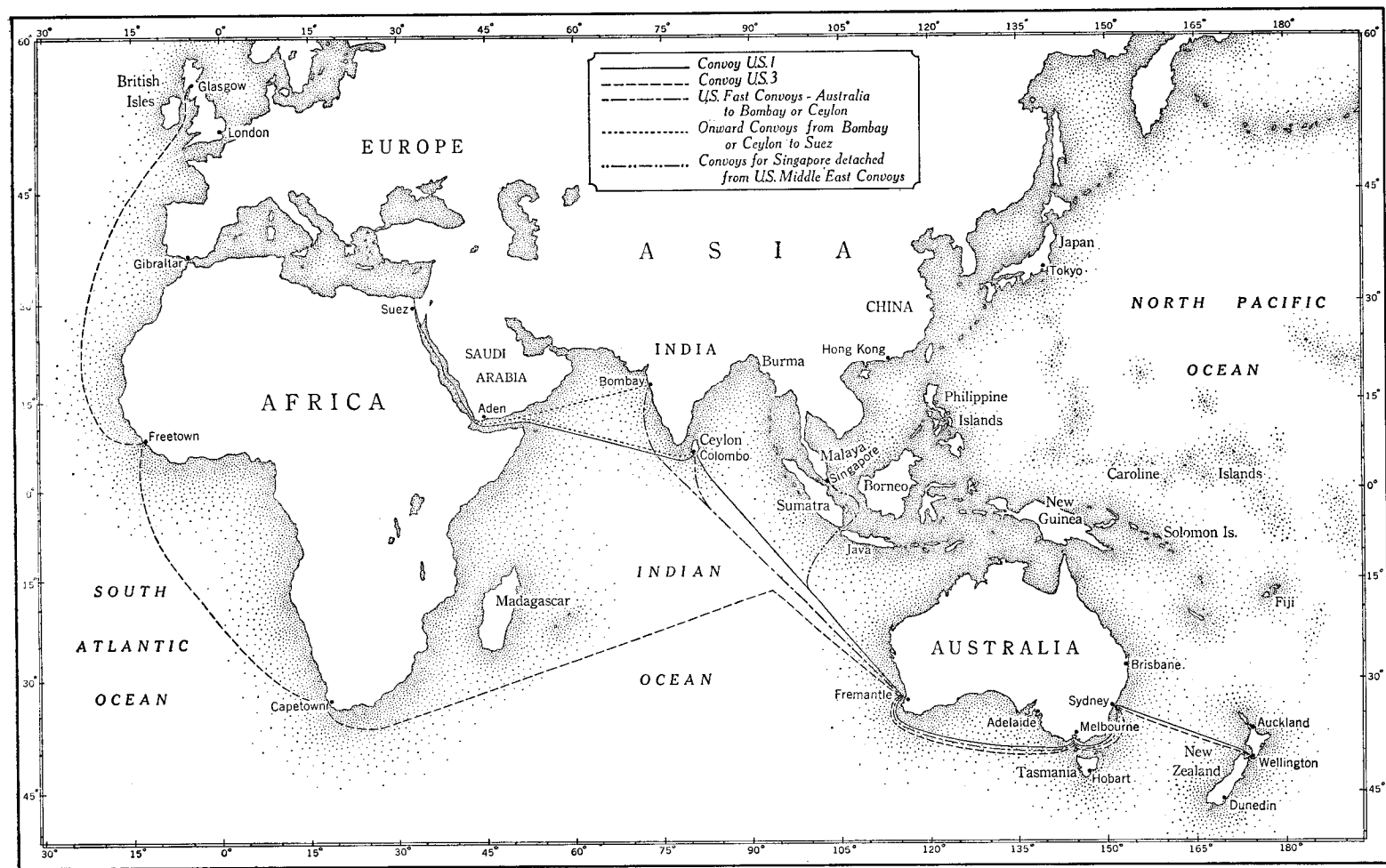
With the sailing of US.10 in April, the transport *Queen Elizabeth*, the world's largest ship, joined the "US" convoys, and thereafter throughout the year she and *Queen Mary* made four passages together to the Middle East, with or without other ships in convoy, maintaining a 60-day cycle to Suez. Completed just about the time of the outbreak of war in 1939, *Queen Elizabeth* secretly and safely crossed the Atlantic in March 1940. After some months in New York she sailed thence and on the 17th November 1940 left Trinidad for Singapore, where she arrived via the Cape on the 13th December. She sailed from Singapore for Fremantle on the 11th February 1941 to form part of convoy US.10.

In general the "US" convoys followed the same procedure, any ships destined for Singapore being detached south-west of Sunda Strait and escorted onward from there by a China Station cruiser, the remainder going on to Colombo (or, in the case of the *Queens*, to Trincomalee) and thence to Suez. Escort from Australia to the limit of the Australia Station, or beyond to Ceylon, was provided by the R.A.N. During 1941, seven "US" convoys, comprising twenty-three transports carrying a total of approximately 92,000 troops, sailed from south-eastern Australia, the last for the year, US.13,⁵ leaving there on the 3rd November. By the end of the year, in the sixteen "US" convoys, comprising sixty-eight ships, which had sailed from Australia since their institution in 1940, there had been carried in round figures some 134,000 (including 14,800 to Malaya) Australians, and 46,200 New Zealanders.

In addition to the "US" convoys, the "ZK" convoys were introduced in March 1941 for the transport of troops to northern Australia and

⁴ This was not long to remain a "temporary expedient", but was the initial move in sending the 8th Australian Division to Malaya. For the detailed story see Vol IV of the Army series.

⁵ Convoys US.9, *Queen Mary*, *Aquitania*, *Mauretania*, *Nieuw Amsterdam*; US.10, *Queen Mary*, *Queen Elizabeth*, *Mauretania*, *Nieuw Amsterdam*, *Ile de France*; US.11a, *Queen Mary*, *Queen Elizabeth*, *Aquitania*; US.11b, *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt*, *Marnix van St Aldegonde*, *Sibajak*; US.12a, *Queen Mary*, *Queen Elizabeth*; US.12b, *Aquitania*, *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt*, *Marnix van St Aldegonde*, *Sibajak*; US.13, *Queen Mary*, *Queen Elizabeth*. Of the total numbers carried, approximately 70,000 were Australians, including some 3,800 RAAF and RAN. The balance were New Zealanders. More than half of the grand total of 92,000 (just over 50,000) were carried in the two *Queens*.



The A.I.F. Convoys

the New Guinea area, to implement the War Cabinet decision of the previous month to reinforce outlying bases. The coastal vessel *Katoomba* was requisitioned and, with *Zealandia*, formed convoy ZK.1 which, escorted by *Manoora*, sailed from Brisbane for Thursday Island, Port Moresby and Rabaul with 1,496 troops on the 15th March. During April *Katoomba*, again escorted by *Manoora*, carried 687 troops and equipment from Sydney to Darwin, after which she was returned to trade; and during the same period *Zealandia*, escorted by *Adelaide*, carried 739 troops to Rabaul, whence the two ships proceeded to Noumea where *Zealandia* embarked Free French soldiers for Australia. During July, August and September a further two northern voyages were made by convoys ZK.3 and ZK.4, comprising *Zealandia* and *Montoro* (4,088 tons) with *Manoora* as escort. On these occasions a total of 1,190 troops were transported.⁶

During the year *Zealandia*, in May and November, made two trooping voyages, carrying a total of 1,713 A.I.F. troops to Singapore, plus 184 R.A.N. and R.A.A.F. On each occasion she was escorted from Fremantle to a position south of Sunda Strait by H.M.A.S. *Sydney*, whence onward escort was provided by H.M. Ships *Danae* in May and *Durban* in November.

The possibility of the need for an extension of the convoy system in view of trends in the international situation was visualised. During August 1941 the Plans Division at Navy Office prepared plans for Australian coastal convoys in the event of war with Japan; and these were ready for implementation when war broke out, though they were not brought into force until some time later.⁷

IV

Time was an important factor in the considerations of the major powers regarding the possibility of war in the Pacific in 1941. Hitler desired a Japanese attack on Singapore as early as possible to hasten the defeat of Britain, and at a conference with the Chief of the Operations Staff of the Combined Forces High Command (General Jodl) and Admiral Raeder on the 18th March, he said that Germany must make every effort to get Japan to attack at once. "If Japan holds Singapore, all other Far Eastern questions in connection with the U.S.A. and Britain will be solved, including Guam, the Philippines, Borneo, and the Dutch East Indies."⁸ Japan, however, was hastening slowly, to an extent waiting on events, and consolidating her position step by step before irrevocably committing herself. Timing was important to her, in that it was necessary to build up her resources, especially of oil, and to be in a position quickly to secure by

⁶ In the "ZK" convoys prior to Japan entering the war, 4,112 troops were carried north; 525 to Thursday Island; 1,078 to Port Moresby; 1,593 to Rabaul; and 916 to Darwin.

⁷ The plans were for five convoy series: (1) once weekly each way between Sydney-Brisbane and Brisbane-Barrier Reef; (2) twice weekly each way between Newcastle-Sydney-Melbourne; (3) once each way every 20 days between Sydney-Wellington, not including trans-Pacific passenger ships which were subject to special arrangements; (4) once every 10 or 11 days westward from Melbourne with outward bound overseas vessels; (5) once each way every 30 days between Adelaide and Fremantle with coastal vessels and outward bound overseas vessels which required to call at Fremantle.

⁸ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 18 Mar 1941.

force the sources of supply which would be denied to her if she went to war with Britain and the Netherlands. In spite of German successes in Europe, Britain was still undefeated; and the Japanese Foreign Minister, Matsuoka, had "grave misgivings" about Russia. Matsuoka, during March and April visited Russia, Germany and Italy. In Berlin efforts were made to persuade him of the advantages to Japan of a speedy attack on Singapore. He learned of strained relations between Germany and Russia, and that Hitler hoped to avoid war with the United States. In Moscow on the 13th April, on his return journey from Germany to Japan, Matsuoka stilled his "grave misgivings" about Russia by concluding a Russo-Japanese non-aggression pact. This pact which, according to Hitler in conversation with Raeder⁹ a few days later, was concluded with Germany's acquiescence, secured Japan's Manchurian frontier and released forces for a southward advance. By March this advance was well under way through "peaceful penetration" when Japan, already ensconced in Northern Indo-China, received from the Vichy French Government the right to occupy the airport at Saigon, which enabled her to dominate the whole of Indo-China and brought her within bombing distance of Singapore. The pattern bore a strong resemblance to that woven by Hitler in the West.

Britain and the United States desired peace in the Pacific, since neither was ready for war there. Britain had her hands full in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, and had no naval forces immediately to spare for the Far East. Her priorities during 1941 were listed by Churchill as: first, the defence of the Island (Britain) including the threat of invasion and the U-boat war; secondly, the struggle in the Middle East and Mediterranean; thirdly, after June, supplies to Soviet Russia; and, last of all, resistance to a Japanese assault. It was, however, always understood that "if Japan invaded Australia or New Zealand the Middle East should be sacrificed to the defence of our own kith and kin".¹

The United States was as yet unprepared for war, and her position in the Pacific was further weakened by the decision to regard the Atlantic and European area as the decisive theatre. The United States Congress passed the "Two-Ocean Navy" Bill in July 1940, but it would be at least two years from then before the two-ocean navy could be built. Meanwhile President Roosevelt adopted the political strategy of helping England, and later Russia, to withstand Germany (which made control of the Atlantic an essential to the United States) and of "babying Japan along" by diplomacy. Peace in the Pacific was, as Roosevelt told a member of his

⁹ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 20 Apr 1941. Hitler said he "valued the Russo-Japanese pact because Japan is now restrained from taking action against Vladivostock and should be induced to attack Singapore instead". In August however (*Fuehrer Naval Conferences*, 22 Aug 1941) when Germany and Russia were at war, Hitler was "convinced that Japan will carry out the attack on Vladivostock as soon as forces have been assembled. The present aloofness can be explained by the fact that the assembling of forces is to be accomplished undisturbed, and the attack is to come as a surprise move." It was an example of Hitler's fatal tendency to project his hopes in an illusory picture.

¹ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol III (1950), p. 523.

Cabinet in July 1941, "terribly important for the control of the Atlantic. . . . I simply have not got enough navy to go around."²

America's first "Lend-Lease" bill became law on the 11th March 1941. At the end of April the United States Government asked that of Britain its views on a proposal to move the greater part of the Pacific Fleet to the Atlantic, leaving in the Pacific forces of the order of three or four battleships, nine cruisers and 30 to 40 destroyers. The Admiralty suggested that the size of the fleet proposed to be left in the Pacific seemed unduly small; that it was most important to retain aircraft carriers in the Pacific; and that the arrival of a British fleet in Singapore in the event of war with Japan would be considerably advanced. The Australian Government, whose views were sought by the British,³ concurred in the Admiralty view in a telegram to London early in May, but added that the strongest concern was felt at the position of Singapore, and that with the transfer of U.S. ships to the Atlantic, "consideration should be immediately given to the release against the event of war with Japan of adequate British capital ships to at once reinforce Singapore".

Actually the transfer of units of the Pacific Fleet to the Atlantic had already been ordered. On the 4th April Admiral Stark described the Atlantic situation in the face of German attacks on British convoys as "hopeless except as we take strong measures to save it". Three days later he ordered the transfer of the battleships *Idaho*, *Mississippi*, and *New Mexico*; the aircraft carrier *Yorktown*; the light cruisers *Philadelphia*, *Brooklyn*, *Savannah* and *Nashville*; and two flotillas of destroyers from the Pacific to the Atlantic Fleet. The transfer was effected by the end of May.⁴ The move left the Pacific Fleet inferior to the Japanese in every category of combat ship; but (except in aircraft carriers) left the balance roughly equal if the combined strength of the potential allies in the Far East were ranged against that of the Japanese. In carriers the Japanese superiority was about one hundred per cent.

During the decade up to 1941, Japan experienced considerable economic growth, a proportion of the raw materials contributing to which came from Manchuria and North China, both open to her exploitation. Certain vital materials however, such as oil, bauxite, tin, rubber and nickel, came from regions beyond her control. Of these, oil was one of the resources

² Sumner Welles, *Seven Major Decisions* (1952), p. 92.

³ This consultation with the Australian Government was upon the insistence of Mr Menzies, who was then in London. At a discussion with the British Chiefs of Staff on the 1st May he learned that the American proposal had been made the previous night and had been accepted by the Defence Committee. His claim that the Dominion Governments should have been consulted resulted in the British Government withholding expression of its views to Washington until those of the Dominions had been obtained.

⁴ Morison, *The Battle of the Atlantic* (1947), pp. 56, 57.

Idaho, *Mississippi* and *New Mexico*, US battleships (1919, 1917, 1918), 33,400, 33,000, 33,400 tons, twelve 14-in and sixteen 5-in guns, 22 kts.

Yorktown, US aircraft carrier (1938), 19,900 tons, eight 5-in and sixteen 1.1-in AA guns, 81-85 aircraft (space for over 100), 34 kts; foundered after being torpedoed, Battle of Midway, 7 Jun 1942.

Philadelphia, *Brooklyn*, *Savannah* and *Nashville*, US cruisers (1938), 9,700, 9,700, 9,475, 9,650 tons, fifteen 6-in guns, 32.5 kts.

in which Japan was most deficient, and which was most vital to her.⁵ She relied almost entirely upon imported oil, eighty per cent of which came from the United States, ten per cent from the Netherlands East Indies, and the remainder from such widely diverse sources as Mexico, Bahrein, and Rumania. Her economic interest was therefore keen in the areas to her south, especially in the Netherlands East Indies, which in 1939 produced nearly 8,000,000 metric tons of oil—almost as much as Japan's stockpile, which reached its peak in that year. As a Japanese economist wrote in October 1940: "If proper approaches are made, it may be easy for Japan to import one-third of that [the N.E.I. annual production of oil] or about 2,700,000 metric tons. In the case of the actual formation of the East Asia economic bloc, shipments to Japan of the entire oil output in the Dutch colony can be assured."⁶ This comment appeared at a time when the Japanese vernacular press was flooded with articles discussing Japan's need for raw materials, and means of securing them.

The Netherlands East Indies, however, strenuously opposed any suggestion that they should join the East-Asian economic bloc, or "Co-Prosperity Sphere" as the Japanese called it. Japan's interest had been manifested over some years in a series of economic delegations to Batavia. In 1937, after prolonged discussions, an economic agreement favourable to Japan was negotiated. Three years later (after the Netherlands were occupied by the Germans) further Japanese economic delegations visited Batavia and pressed for more oil and larger immigration quotas. They were refused after many weeks of discussion, and negotiations were finally broken off on the 18th June 1941. A few days later the Japanese decided to accelerate their moves to take what they could not get by peaceful means. As has since been learned, a conference in the presence of the Emperor on the 2nd July 1941 agreed upon an "outline policy in consequence of changed international situation", and approval was given to an advance by Japanese forces to South Indo-China.

Through intercepted messages sent out by the Japanese Government the United States authorities (who had succeeded in breaking Japanese ciphers) became aware of this decision. The United States thereupon told Britain that if the Japanese made any overt move in the Far East the United States would impose economic and financial embargoes upon her; and told Japan that if she moved into Indo-China, the negotiations then in progress between her and the United States in the hope of settling differences peacefully, would be broken off. This warning had no effect.

⁵ Interrogated after the war, Fleet Admiral Nagano, supreme naval adviser to the Emperor, stated: "I think one of the large causes of this war was the question of oil. . . . Not only the two services but the civilian elements were extremely interested, because after the U.S., Great Britain and the Netherlands refused to sell any more oil, our country was seriously threatened by the oil shortage. Consequently, every element in Japan was keenly interested in the southern regions." Admiral Nomura, former Ambassador to the United States, expressed similar views. (Jerome B. Cohen, *Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction* (1949), p. 133). But it was Japan's obvious intention to move south which led to the freezing of her assets and thus to the denial of oil.

⁶ Yamada, Fumio, in *Tosei Ketzai*, Tokyo, Oct 1940. Quoted by Cohen in *Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction*, p. 46.

On the 24th July a Japanese invasion force was reported at Camranh Bay, on the east coast of Indo-China. President Roosevelt at once sent for the Japanese Ambassador (Nomura), and told him that he had permitted the continued export of oil to Japan in the hope that this would tend to keep war out of the South Pacific; but if Japan attempted to seize Netherlands East Indies oil, war would certainly result. He then proposed that if the Japanese Government would refrain from occupying Indo-China, he would do all in his power to obtain from the Governments of China, Britain, the Netherlands, and of course the United States, a declaration to regard Indo-China as a neutralised country. The following day, however, the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs told the United States Ambassador in Tokyo (Mr Grew) that the Vichy Government had consented to admit Japan to a joint protectorate over Indo-China.⁷ Japanese occupation of land, sea and air bases in Indo-China proceeded immediately. On the 26th July the United States Government froze all Japanese assets in America; and the British and Dutch governments took similar action.

Japan was now in a quandary. Until she could secure oil from outside to augment her own small annual production, natural and synthetic, of approximately 500,000 metric tons, she had to draw on reserves. These in 1939 were at a peak total of some 8,100,000 metric tons⁸ to meet an estimated wartime annual call for 5,500,000 metric tons to cover army, navy and civilian requirements. She had to decide her course. Though conversations with the United States Government were resumed in August, the price demanded by the Americans for the release of the economic stranglehold—Japanese withdrawal not only from Indo-China but from China itself—was unacceptable to the more extreme elements in Japan, led by the army; and the Supreme Command began seriously to consider conditions for operations against America, Britain and the Netherlands.

In these considerations it was agreed that in the event of war Japan must capture the rich natural resources of the southern area at the beginning of the war, otherwise her minimum requirements of mobilisation supplies could not be fulfilled. She must therefore at the outset secure command of the sea and air to ensure the speedy defeat of her enemies. From this point of view various plans were studied, and about the middle of August it was decided to adopt one which, though it disregarded the German advocacy to delay as long as possible American entry into the war, seemed to offer the best chance of success. It was to start operations against the Philippines and Malaya simultaneously, and then to proceed southwards to capture the Netherlands East Indies from the east and west.

On the 6th September, at a meeting of the Japanese Supreme War Council presided over by the Emperor, resolutions presented by the army were adopted. These were: to proceed with war preparations so that they would be completed toward the end of October; at the same time to

⁷ On 29 July a protocol providing for the "joint defence" of Indo-China was signed between the French and Japanese governments in Vichy.

⁸ At 7 Dec 1941, when Japan attacked, the oil reserve was down to 7,000,000 metric tons due to United States, Dutch and British embargoes. Cohen, *Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction*, pp. 134-35.

endeavour by diplomatic means to have Japanese demands agreed to by America and Britain; to prepare for war against America, Britain and Holland if, by the early part of October, there was no reasonable hope of agreement through diplomacy. At the same time a list of "Japan's minimum demands and maximum concessions",⁹ which in effect allotted the demands to Japan and the concessions to America, Britain, and Holland, was adopted. At the conference Admiral Nagano likened Japan to a patient who was certain to die if nothing was done, but might be saved by a dangerous operation.

Detailed operational plans were put in hand. From the 10th on through the 13th September the navy carried out table top exercises at the Naval College, Meguro, Tokyo, under the supervision of Admiral Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet. The items studied were: (1) a naval operation for seizing command of the sea in the West Pacific (the capture of American, British, Dutch areas in the Orient); (2) a surprise assault against Hawaii.

There remained in Japan more moderate elements, including the Prime Minister, Prince Konoye, who wished to avoid war if possible, and their views were voiced at a meeting of cabinet ministers on the 12th October. The stumbling block was the American demand that the Japanese withdraw from China, which the intransigent group, led by General Tojo, the War Minister, refused to consider. A few days later Konoye resigned; and on 17th October a new ministry, dominated by the army, assumed office with Tojo as Prime Minister, War Minister, and Minister for Home Affairs.

V

These and other indications of the growing danger of war were not lost upon the Australian and British Governments. For some months plans had been discussed for the withdrawal of European women and children from Nauru and Ocean Islands.¹ In July these plans were implemented, and on the 17th of that month H.M.A.S. *Westralia*, with the merchant vessels *Skagerak*, *Vito* and *Kenilworth*² (these two last-named with passengers from Ocean Island) sailed from Nauru with a total of ninety-three refugees and reached Australia without incident. Arrangements were also made to demolish moorings, phosphate loading gear, wireless stations etc at a later date. There remained on the islands administrative and phosphate staffs and native labourers, the native populations, and the small military detachments, "Wren" at Nauru and "Heron" at

⁹ Summarised, this list was:

1. United States and Britain must let Japan settle "China incident", must close Burma Road and give no more assistance to Chiang Kai-shek.
2. There must be no increase of British or American military forces in the Far East, even in their own possessions.
3. No interference with Japanese-French relations as to Indo-China.
4. American cooperation for obtaining needed raw materials, by restoration of free trade and assisting Japan "to establish close economic relations with Thai and Netherlands East Indies".
5. Japan will not use Indo-China as a base for operations against any country except China and will evacuate Indo-China "as soon as a just peace is established in the Far East".
6. Japan will guarantee the neutrality of the Philippines.

¹ These plans were first approved in principle at a War Cabinet meeting in May 1941.

² Of 4,244, 5,181 and 5,457 tons respectively.

Ocean Island, each of about 50 men and two field guns, which had been installed in February 1941 against a possible repetition of the German raider attacks.

During August there were indications that the Japanese were withdrawing their merchant ships from world trade, and, nearer home, a Malay pearling skipper reported that all Japanese luggers operating off Bathurst Island had been ordered to proceed to Palau and lay up.

In August the British Prime Minister, crossing the Atlantic in the new battleship *Prince of Wales*,³ met and conferred with President Roosevelt at Placentia Bay, Newfoundland. This was the Atlantic Meeting whereat was drawn up the Atlantic Charter, a joint Anglo-American Declaration of Principles, the substance and spirit of which was, in its first draft (but little amended in the Declaration's final form) a British production composed by Mr Churchill. This Declaration was published simultaneously in London and Washington on the 14th August. The Australian Prime Minister, Mr Menzies, said of it in Parliament six days later that the United States and Great Britain had entered into "a great moral partnership by which they make themselves in substance the joint champions of that way of life for which we in Australia stand". The following month, in London, the Atlantic Charter was accepted and endorsed by the representatives of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, U.S.S.R., Yugoslavia, and Free France. During the conversations at Placentia Bay Mr Churchill and Mr Roosevelt discussed the situation in the Far East, and agreed to take parallel action in warning Japan that any further encroachments on her part would compel their governments "to take countermeasures even though those might lead to war" between their countries and Japan.

Mr Churchill arrived back in London on the 19th August. Six days later he raised with the Admiralty the question of the formation of an Eastern Fleet. In a minute to the First Sea Lord on the 25th of the month Mr Churchill suggested sending one of the new *King George V* battleships,⁴ with *Repulse* or *Renown* and one fast aircraft carrier, to the Far East. This force could show itself in the triangle Aden-Singapore-Simonstown where "it would exert a paralysing effect upon Japanese naval action".⁵

The Admiralty, who had been considering this matter for some time, replied that it was proposed to send to the Indian Ocean between mid-September 1941 and the end of January 1942 the battleships *Nelson* and *Rodney* and the four "R" class ships *Revenge*,⁶ *Royal Sovereign*, *Ramillies* and *Resolution* (the "R's" being ships of about 2,500 miles endurance at 20 knots in smooth water), and the battle cruiser *Renown*. The aircraft

³ HMS *Prince of Wales*, battleship (1941), 35,000 tons, ten 14-in and sixteen 5.5-in guns, 28.5 kts; sunk by Jap naval aircraft in S China Sea, 10 Dec 1941.

⁴ *King George V* class: British battleships, *King George V*, *Prince of Wales*, *Duke of York*, *Anson*, *Howe*.

⁵ Churchill, Minute to First Sea Lord, 25 Aug 1941. (*The Second World War*, Vol III (1950), p. 768.)

⁶ HMS *Revenge*, battleship (1916), 29,150 tons, eight 15-in and twelve 6-in guns, two torp tubes, 21 kts.

carrier *Hermes* was already there, and it was proposed to send there *Ark Royal* in April 1942, and *Indomitable*⁷ in an emergency. The Admiralty's reasons for the proposed dispositions were that the four "R's", used meanwhile as troop convoy escorts in the Indian Ocean, would relieve cruisers of that duty and deter the Japanese from sending raiding battleships to the area; would be free from submarine and aircraft attack; and would eventually form part of the Eastern Fleet, formation of which was dependent on the availability of cruisers and destroyers, of which ten and twenty-four respectively were needed. *Nelson* and *Rodney* would give the best backing to the "R's" when the Eastern Fleet was formed, the combination constituting the most homogeneous fleet which could be provided as regards speed. It was hoped that the combination of a battle cruiser and aircraft carrier would deter the Japanese from sending heavy cruisers to attack Indian Ocean trade. The Admiralty conceded that it might be desirable in the first instance, as a deterrent against Japan going to war, to send *Nelson*, *Rodney*, *Renown* and *Hermes* to Singapore; but if war eventuated they would have to retire thence to Trincomalee. Finally, the Admiralty suggested that the presence of all these ships in the Indian Ocean would "go some way to meet the wishes of Australia and New Zealand for the Far East to be reinforced".

Mr Churchill disagreed with these proposals, and in a further minute of the 29th August referred to the Admiralty's insistence on keeping the new battleships in the Home Fleet to counter any possible Atlantic sorties by the German *Tirpitz*.

Tirpitz (he said) is doing to us exactly what a K.G.V. in the Indian Ocean would do to the Japanese Navy. It exercises a vague general fear and menaces all points at once. It appears, and disappears, causing immediate reactions and perturbations on the other side.⁸

There is a curious similarity between this suggestion by Mr Churchill and that, referred to earlier, by Mr Roosevelt to keep United States ships in the Pacific "popping up here and there and keep the Japs guessing". It is interesting, too, that while Mr Churchill was a former First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr Roosevelt was a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Navy. They were, as Mr Churchill referred to himself in correspondence between them, "Naval Persons".

Nevertheless, the situations cited by Mr Churchill were not analogous. The "vague general fear" exercised by *Tirpitz* was of attack on Atlantic convoys. The German Navy was in no position to contemplate a fleet action, but might risk a raiding sortie. The Japanese Navy was in a different position. It was a powerful balanced fleet, capable of forming a line of battle against any force Britain could oppose to it. A British force such as that envisaged by Churchill, though it "menaced all points at once" in the Indian Ocean where there were no points or Japanese trade or troop

⁷ HMS *Indomitable*, aircraft carrier (1941), 23,000 tons, sixteen 4.5-in guns, over 60 aircraft. 31 kts.

⁸ Churchill, Vol III, p. 773.

convoys for it to menace, need have caused no "vague general fear" to a Japanese fleet well to the north of Singapore. Such a fleet need only have been concerned at the presence in its own waters, or in waters where it was necessary for it to operate, of an enemy force powerful enough to seek a fleet engagement.

An analogy did, however, lie in the example offered by the British Navy's experience in the Aegean during the German invasion of Crete. Then, as to its influence in the Crete campaign, the presence of a powerful Mediterranean fleet caused the Germans little concern while it remained south of the island. When portion of it penetrated into the Aegean the Germans, with no surface fleet but with great air strength unopposed in the air, were able to make the Aegean untenable for the British ships, and to inflict on them losses comparable to those which might have been expected in a major fleet action. In August 1941 the Japanese were already within bombing range of Singapore and had a powerful fleet also. The dangers inherent in this situation were clear to the Admiralty, as is evidenced by their proviso (mentioned above) that, if war with Japan eventuated, a fleet based on Singapore would have to retire thence to Trincomalee.

In the event, what was considered to be political expediency won the day, and the Admiralty was overruled in a series of discussions which took place during August, September, and October. The Admiralty plan, which was the sound one, could not be implemented before the end of the year. The increasing likelihood of Japan resorting to war led to a political desire for a gesture calculated to deter her. Support for this came from various quarters, from Singapore, from Australia, and from the British Foreign Office. At a conference at Singapore on the 29th September⁹ attended by Sir Earle Page, a former Prime Minister of Australia, who was appointed Special Representative of the Australian Government to the United Kingdom War Cabinet, emphasis was laid on the propaganda value of even one or two battleships in Singapore. This was supported, on Earle Page's recommendation, by the Australian Labour Government which assumed office on the 7th October, and which urged the British Government to dispose capital ships in the Far East as soon as possible for the defence of Empire interests in the eastern hemisphere, for the maintenance of communications to the Middle East, and for sustaining generally the war efforts of the Dominions in the Pacific and their overseas forces in particular. The importance of including a modern capital ship in the force was stressed.

The Defence Committee in London discussed the matter on the 17th October, at about which date the British Naval Attaché, Tokyo, reported that various indications showed that all units of the Japanese Navy were mobilised on a complete war basis.¹ Earlier in the month *Repulse*, which

⁹ Those at the conference were the Rt Hon A. Duff Cooper, recently appointed British Minister of State in the Far East; Brooke-Popham; Layton; Sir Shenton Thomas, Governor of Malaya; Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, British Ambassador at Chungking; Sir Josiah Crosby, British Minister at Bangkok; and Sir Earle Page.

¹ DNI Melbourne received this information from the Captain on the Intelligence Staff, Singapore, on the 20 Oct.

had escorted a Middle and Far East troop convoy (WS.11) south through the Atlantic, reached Durban and joined the East Indies Station. At the Defence Committee meeting Churchill urged that she be joined at Singapore forthwith by a *King George V* battleship and fleet carrier. The Admiralty adhered to the view that *Rodney*, *Nelson* and the four "R's" should be sent, and the modern ships retained in the Atlantic. They argued that the presence of six battleships at Singapore, even though four were obsolescent, would force the Japanese to detach a large part of their fleet and uncover Japan to the United States Navy, of whose co-operation the Admiralty felt assured. But Churchill visualised Japanese attacks on Indian Ocean routes by fast raiding battleships as a more likely danger than an attack in force on Singapore, and against such attacks he considered the "R's" would be impotent. He wanted *Prince of Wales* sent to Singapore at once. The Foreign Office supported him, and the Admiralty lost the day.

It was intended to send with *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, the modern armoured aircraft carrier *Indomitable*, as a first and immediate instalment of a Far Eastern Fleet, later to be joined by *Nelson*, *Rodney*, and the four "R's". Unfortunately *Indomitable*, "working up" in the West Indies, ran ashore while entering Jamaica and had to be docked for repairs. Thus a vital unit, with her aircraft, was denied to the force. The loss in November of *Ark Royal* removed that ship also from any Far Eastern Fleet.

As from the 24th October Admiral Sir Tom Phillips² was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, and on that day hoisted his flag in *Prince of Wales* at Greenock. He was an officer with considerable destroyer experience afloat (he was Commodore (D) and later Rear-Admiral (D) Home Fleet Flotillas from April 1938 to May 1939) and he had a long and brilliant staff record. As Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff he had been in closest possible touch with the naval side of the war at sea. But he had no actual experience of that war, especially as it was being fought under the conditions imposed by naval aviation. Only three days elapsed between his relief at the Admiralty after a period of years there as Director of Plans and Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff, and his hoisting his flag in *Prince of Wales*. The next day, the 25th October, the flagship sailed for Singapore via the Cape, accompanied only by two destroyers, *Electra* and *Express*. Force "G", as the three ships were designated, reached Free-town on the 5th November, Simonstown on the 16th and Ceylon on the 28th, where they were joined by *Repulse*, and the destroyers *Jupiter* and *Encounter*³ from the Mediterranean.

On the 26th October Mr Churchill telegraphed to Mr Curtin telling of the intention to build up an Eastern Fleet by the end of the year:

² Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, KCB; RN. (HMS's *Bacchante* 1915, *Lancaster* 1916-19.) Principal Staff Officer to COS, Mediterranean Fleet (Cmdre Dudley Pound) 1925-27; Director of Plans, Admiralty 1935-38; Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiralty, Jun 1939-Oct 1941. B. 19 Feb 1888. lost in sinking of HMS *Prince of Wales*, 10 Dec 1941.

³ HMS's *Electra*, *Express* and *Encounter*, destroyers (1934), 1,375 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; *Electra* and *Encounter* sunk in Java Sea, 27 Feb and 1 Mar 1942. HMS *Jupiter*, destroyer (1939), 1,690 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk in Java Sea, 28 Feb 1942.

In the interval (he said) in order further to deter Japan, we are sending forth—with our newest battleship, *Prince of Wales*, to join *Repulse* in Indian Ocean. This is done in spite of protests from the Commander-in-Chief Home Fleet, and is a serious risk for us to run. *Prince of Wales* will be noticed at Capetown quite soon. In addition the four “R” battleships are being moved as they become ready to eastern waters.

In a speech at the Lord Mayor’s Luncheon at the Mansion House on the 10th November the British Prime Minister delivered “A Warning to Japan” in which he touched on naval dispositions:

We now feel ourselves strong enough to provide a powerful naval force of heavy ships, with its necessary ancillary vessels, for service if needed in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Thus we stretch out the long arm of brotherhood and motherhood to the Australian and New Zealand peoples and to the peoples of India.

And he added:

I take this occasion to say, and it is my duty to say, that, should the United States become involved in war with Japan, the British declaration will follow within the hour.

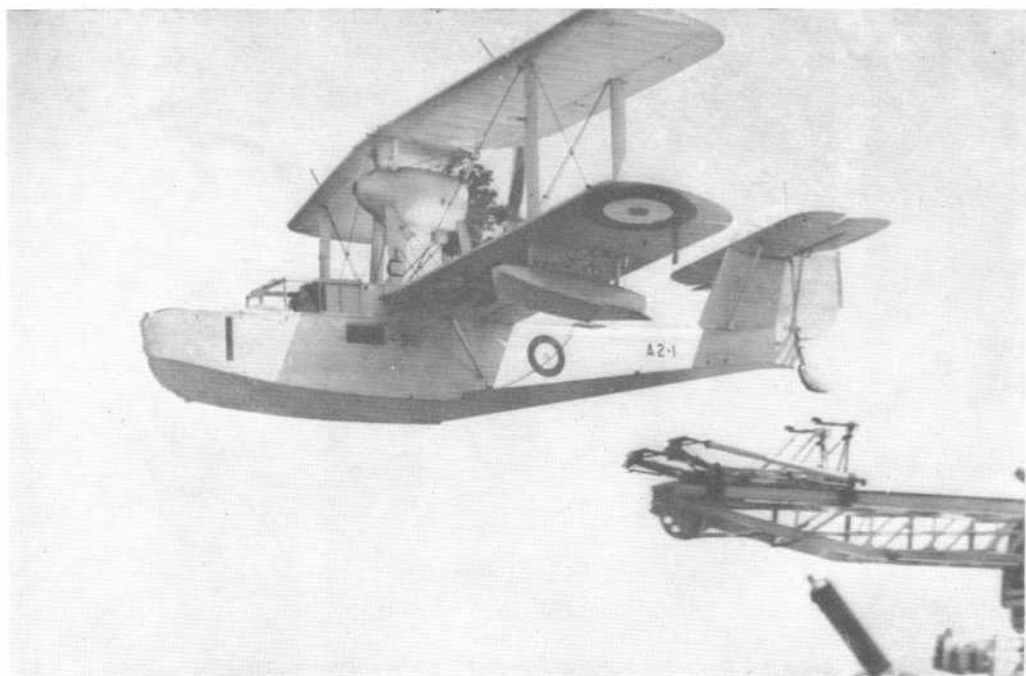
To say that the “powerful naval force of heavy ships” had its necessary ancillary vessels was to overpaint the picture. On the 24th November the Admiralty directed that *Prince of Wales*, *Repulse*, *Revenge*,⁴ *Electra*, *Express*, *Jupiter*, *Encounter*, “and such other units of the China Station as were desired by the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet”, were to be considered as forming part of the Eastern Fleet. The units on the China Station were three old “D” class 6-inch gun cruisers engaged on convoy escort duties, seven destroyers (including the Australians *Vampire* and *Vendetta*, the second-named of which was in dockyard hands), and a number of escort vessels, minesweepers and patrol craft. There was little here with which to attempt to build a balanced force; and in addition, lacking an aircraft carrier, the force was without its all-important self-contained air cover and air striking arm. When, to the tune of world-wide “deterrent” publicity, Force “G” reached Singapore on the 2nd December, Admiral Phillips notified his command of the names of eight vessels which were to form the Eastern Fleet until further orders. They were the seven mentioned above, and H.M.A.S. *Vampire*, now under the command of Commander Moran.⁵ It was an unbalanced token force with which to face grave and growing naval responsibilities in the Far East.

VI

As stated at the start of this chapter, the Australia Station during 1941 was free from enemy attack until November. At least four German surface raiders entered the station however; and news of raider activity in adjacent areas was received from time to time. In February the raider *Komet*

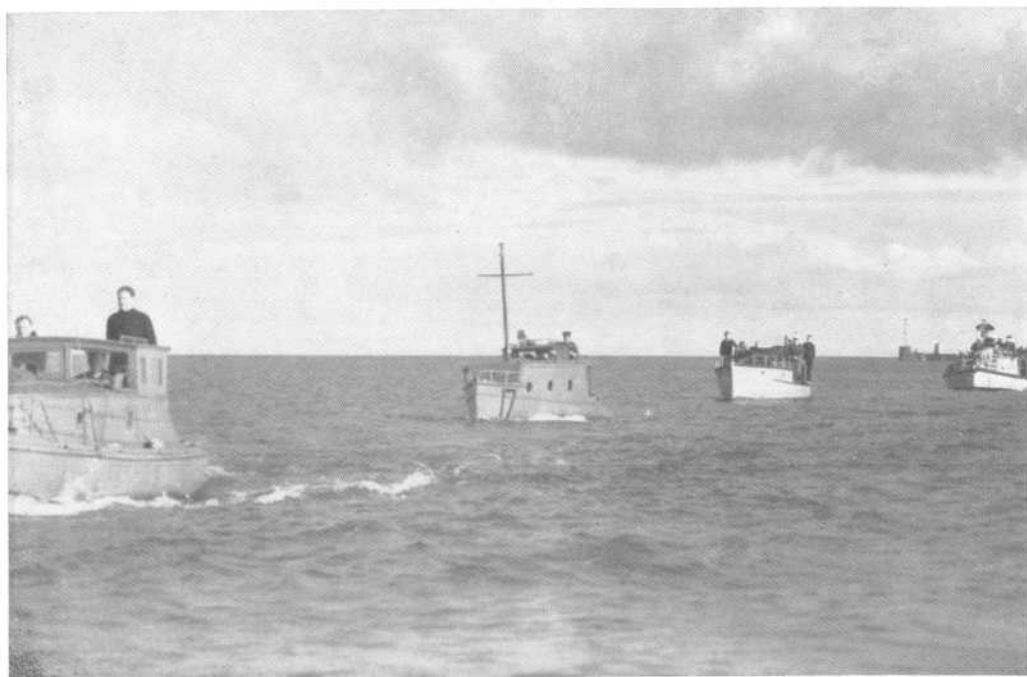
⁴ *Revenge* never joined Force “G”. She reached Aden, escorting Convoy WS.12 from the United Kingdom, on 20 Nov. From there she went to Bombay, and on 13 Dec to Trincomalee.

⁵ Cdr W. T. A. Moran, RAN. Entered RAN College 1917 (HMAS *Brisbane* 1921). Torpedo specialist. Cdr RANC 1939; HMAS *Canberra* 1939-41; comd HMAS *Vampire* 1941-42. B. Kalgoorlie, WA, 11 Dec 1903. Lost in sinking of *Vampire*, 9 Apr 1942.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Launching a "Walrus" from Catapult in H.M.A.S. *Canberra*.



(Australian War Memorial)

Naval Auxiliary Patrol.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Members of the Australian Naval Board 1941. From left to right: Mr R. Anthony, Finance Member; Engr Rear-Adm P. E. McNeil, 3rd Naval Member; Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin, Retiring 1st Naval Member; Mr G. L. Macandie, Secretary Naval Board; Vice-Adm Sir Guy Royle, 1st Naval Member; Mr A. R. Nankervis, Secretary, Department of Navy; Commodore J. W. Durnford, 2nd Naval Member; Mr H. G. Brain, Business Member.



(Department of Information)

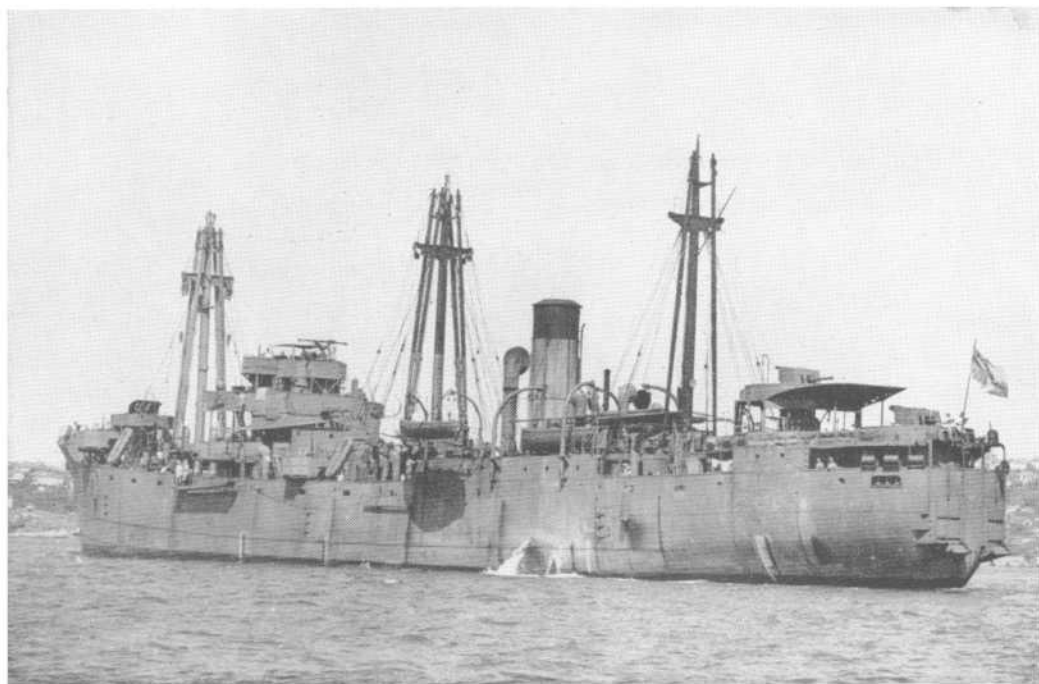
New Entries marching at H.M.A.S. *Rushcutter*.



H.M.A.S. *Sydney* leading
Convoy "U.S.12a"—
Queen Mary,
Queen Elizabeth—
past Wilson's Promontory,
4th September 1941.

H.M.A.S. *Bungaree*—
Minelayer—in Sydney
Harbour.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



(R.A.N. Historical Section)



Captain J. Burnett
on Bridge of
H.M.A.S. *Sydney*.

(A. G. Rippon)

Survivors from
Kormoran.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

traversed the station west-bound well to the south of Australia, after her activities at Nauru. In March her Nauru companion, *Orion*, followed her. *Orion* spent some fruitless weeks in the Indian Ocean, and in June rounded the Cape and entered the Atlantic. *Komet* was at Kerguelen during March, but in April moved eastward and entered the western extreme of the Australia Station. She was some 350 miles west of North-West Cape on the 14th May, whence she steamed south-west to meet the captured whaler *Adjutant* (350 tons). Towards the end of the month the two ships made for the Pacific, and during June passed eastward through the Australia Station well to the south. On the 25th of the month they were off New Zealand, and *Adjutant* laid mines, ten in each instance, in the approaches to Lyttelton and Wellington.⁶ After this operation *Adjutant* developed engine trouble, and was subsequently scuttled. *Komet* cruised in the south-west Pacific with no success throughout July, and then moved north-east toward the Panama isthmus. Here, during August, she had better luck. On the 14th of the month, masquerading as the Japanese *Ryoku Maru* in the vicinity of the Galapagos Islands, she intercepted and sank the steamer *Australind* (5,020 tons) which, loaded with concentrates, had left Port Pirie for Panama early in July. Three days later she intercepted and captured *Kota Nopan* (7,322 tons), a Dutch ship which sailed from Thursday Island on the 21st July, and had a valuable cargo of rubber and tin. This ship, with a prize crew, was despatched to France, and reached Bordeaux in November. Two days after her meeting with *Kota Nopan*, *Komet*, on the 19th August, met and sank the British-India steamer *Devon* (9,036 tons), bound from Liverpool to New Zealand.

Some two months after *Komet* passed eastward through the Australia Station from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, another German raider, *Atlantis*, followed her. This ship, after her operations in the north-west Indian Ocean in January and February 1941 rounded the Cape and entered the Atlantic in April. Here, on the 19th April, she met a newcomer to the raider fleet, *Kormoran*,⁷ which had been operating in the Atlantic and was now bound for the Indian Ocean. *Atlantis* remained in the Atlantic until July, sinking five ships including the Australian *Rabaul* (5,618 tons), which was bound from Milford Haven to Capetown when attacked and sunk with the loss of nine of her crew some 700 miles north-west of Walvis Bay on the 14th May. About the middle of July *Atlantis* rounded the Cape and re-entered the Indian Ocean. She was there for the best part of a month without making any attacks, and in August passed through the Australia Station to the south and entered the Pacific. On the 11th September she captured the Norwegian *Silvaplana* (4,793 tons) about 800 miles north-east of the Kermadec Islands, and sent her to France, and on the 20th, just about midway between Sydney and

⁶ These mines, of magnetic type, were probably defective when laid. They have apparently never detonated, and their presence was not known to the New Zealand authorities until it was revealed by captured German documents after the war.

⁷ *Kormoran*, German auxiliary cruiser (1938), 9,400 tons, six 5.9-in guns, six torp tubes, 320 mines, 18 kts; sunk off Western Australian coast on 19 Nov 1941, after being in action with HMAS *Sydney*.

Valparaiso, met *Komet*, which had returned south-west after her successes off the Galapagos Islands. After that meeting the two ships set out on their separate ways to Germany. *Komet* was successful. She rounded the Horn on the 9th October, and reached Hamburg on the 30th November.⁸ *Atlantis* was less fortunate. She rounded the Horn on the 29th October, and on the 22nd November 1941, was brought to action and sunk by H.M.S. *Devonshire* north-west of Ascension Island. Three days before this, *Kormoran*, which ship *Atlantis* had met in the South Atlantic, was also sunk—on the Australia Station as the result of an action with H.M.A.S. *Sydney*.

Kormoran, formerly the *Steiermark* of the Hamburg-Amerika line, was a fast, converted twin-screw cargo ship of 9,400 tons gross, with a speed of 18 knots when clean. She was driven by diesel electric motors, and had an endurance of 70,000 miles at 10 knots, of 50,000 miles at 17 knots. Built in 1938, she was the most modern of the German raiders. As converted she was heavily armed with six 5.9-inch and four 3.7-inch guns; five anti-aircraft machine-guns; and six torpedo tubes, one submerged and two on deck on each side. She carried two aircraft and approximately 300 mines. She commissioned on 9th October 1940 under Lieut-Commander Anton Detmers, a determined and capable officer who had visited Australia as a lieutenant in the cruiser *Köln* in 1933, and who had war experience in command of a destroyer in the Norwegian campaign. She sailed from Gotenhafen on the start of her cruise on the 3rd December 1940, reached the open Atlantic via Denmark Strait ten days later, and entered her operational area south of latitude 40 degrees north, on the 19th December.

On the 6th January 1941, *Kormoran* sank her first ship, the Greek steamer *Antonis* (3,729 tons), and her second, the tanker *British Union* (6,987 tons), on the 18th. In this second attack, which was made after nightfall by the light of searchlights and star shells, the raider narrowly missed an encounter with the Australian-manned armed merchant cruiser *Arawa*. That ship, bound for Freetown, sighted searchlights and gun-flashes, heard the raider alarm report from *British Union*, and closed the position. She found nothing in the darkness, but next morning rescued one boat's crew of survivors from the tanker. *Arawa* then fruitlessly searched the area for three days before resuming her course for Freetown, where she arrived on the 26th January.

On the 29th January *Kormoran* was some 800 miles west of Freetown, and on this day sank two more ships, the British *Afric Star* (11,900 tons) and *Eurylochus* (5,723 tons). On the 1st February she crossed the equator, and on the 7th met the supply ship *Nordmark* (ex-*Westerwald*, 10,000 tons) to which she transferred 170 prisoners. On the 25th, some 800 miles south-south-east of St Helena she met the raider *Penguin* bound for Kerguelen to refit, after which she went north again to operate in the vicinity of the equator. Here she experienced bad engine trouble and no

⁸ *Komet*, starting a second cruise in Oct 1942, was sunk by British destroyers on the 14th of that month off Cape de la Hague, in the English Channel.

operational success. On the 16th March she met *Scheer* returning to Germany after her Indian Ocean operations. Throughout the rest of March and most of April *Kormoran* remained in the Atlantic, adding to her list of victims with the British ships *Agnita*, *Canadolite*, and *Craftsman*, and the Greek steamer *Nicolaos D.L.*,⁹ all of which were sunk, excepting *Canadolite*, which reached France as a prize. On the 19th April, in the South Atlantic, *Kormoran* met *Atlantis*, and during the night of 1st-2nd May she rounded the Cape into the Indian Ocean.

Here Detmers (now promoted Commander) had no success until the 26th June, when *Kormoran* sank the Yugoslav steamer *Velebit* (4,153 tons) in an attack during the darkness of early morning in the Bay of Bengal. In the afternoon of the same day she met the Australian steamer *Mareeba* (3,472 tons), bound from Java to Colombo. The raider was at this time disguised as the Japanese *Sakito Maru* (7,126 tons), and her approach was concealed by a rain squall. When she reached a favourable position she ordered *Mareeba* to stop. *Mareeba's* master, Captain Skinner,¹ was an outstanding example of the fine type of officer produced by the Merchant Service; patriotic, courageous, learned in the ways of the sea. He was well-known in the Australian trade. "I knew him," recalled Long, the Director of Naval Intelligence, "when I went to Sydney as Staff Officer (Intelligence) in 1934-35, right through until he sailed on his last voyage, and a finer man and seaman hasn't been born." On this occasion he was true to type, and on being challenged by the raider he immediately warned other ships and the naval authorities by broadcasting a distress message. The raider thereupon opened heavy fire, one of the first salvos destroying her victim's wireless room. *Mareeba's* complement of forty-eight were taken on board the raider, where one subsequently died from a heart attack. The ship herself was sunk by scuttling charges in 8°15'N., 88°06'E.

Kormoran then proceeded to a position about 900 miles south of Ceylon and midway between the Chagos Archipelago and Sumatra, where for about a fortnight she underwent an overhaul, and changed camouflage from that of a Japanese ship to "the best disguise of all—insignificance". At the conclusion of this period, in mid-July, the raider, until the end of September, cruised over a wide area from within the Australia Station some 200 miles west of Shark Bay, to the north-west Indian Ocean. On the evening of 13th August, when some 200 miles west of Carnarvon, she sighted her first ship in seven weeks, a steamer of about 6,000 tons; but suspicious of this ship's actions, which made him think she must be a decoy, Detmers refrained from attacking. He then considered, but dismissed as not worthwhile, the idea of laying mines off Geraldton and Carnarvon, and instead proceeded north; and on the 26th of August those in the raider sighted the first land they had seen in 258 days—

⁹ Of 3,561, 11,309, 8,022 and 5,486 tons respectively.

¹ Capt M. B. Skinner. (Served at sea throughout 1914-18 war; in 1914-15 as Third Officer in *Mallina* while acting as collier to HMAS *Australia*.) Master of *Tanda* to Mar 1941, *Mareeba* Apr-Jun 1941. Lost after sinking of German prison ship, 2 Feb 1942.

a mountain peak on the island on Enggano, off south-west Sumatra. On the 23rd September, between the Maldives and Seychelles in the north-west Indian Ocean, *Kormoran* met and sank her eleventh and last merchant ship victim, the Greek steamer *Stamatios G. Embiricos* (3,941 tons).²

Detmers was now ordered by the German Admiralty to rendezvous with *Kulmerland* (the supply ship which had accompanied the Nauru raiders in December 1940) which, now disguised as an American steamer of the Luckenbach Line, left Kobe on the 3rd September. The two ships met on the 16th October about 1,100 miles west of Fremantle, and sailed leisurely north in company for ten days. During this period the raider provisioned and fuelled from *Kulmerland*, and transferred to her all her remaining prisoners (except four Chinese taken from *Eurylochus*).³ After parting from *Kulmerland*, *Kormoran* moved off to the westward where an engine refit was undertaken. Detmers apparently intended to lay a minefield off Perth; but received information from the German Admiralty that a convoy was due to leave Fremantle escorted by H.M.S. *Cornwall*,⁴ and this caused him to abandon the project and decide instead to investigate the area off Shark Bay. Around the middle of November, *Kormoran* was steering easterly, and then north-easterly towards her new objective.

From February 1941 H.M.A.S. *Sydney* was mainly employed on patrols and convoy escort in Australian waters. In April she carried Admiral Colvin and the Australian delegation to Singapore to the ABD conference. On her return to Fremantle Captain Burnett (on the 15th May) succeeded Collins in command. One of the original 1913 entry at the Naval College, Burnett was an officer of professional achievement and promise. He was the third college graduate to reach the rank of captain in the Royal Australian Navy, being promoted in December 1938. His predecessors were Farncomb (June 1937) and Collins (December 1937). He was a gunnery specialist, and had a "Five First Class" record in lieutenant's courses. In 1932 he passed the Staff Course, and he shone as a staff officer. He was in England when war broke out in 1939, and on his return to Australia was, in November of that year, appointed to Navy Office as Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff, and later as Deputy Chief, to Admiral Colvin. In a letter to *The Times*, London, on 19th December 1941, Colvin wrote of him:

² When *Stamatios G. Embiricos* became overdue and it was suspected she was another raider victim, HMAS *Australia*, then on convoy escort duty in the Indian Ocean, was sent to reconnoitre Kerguelen and Crozet Islands. She sailed from Colombo via Mauritius and reached Kerguelen Island on the 1st November 1941, remaining there until the 4th, when she sailed for the Crozets. She returned to Durban on the 11th November. At Kerguelen was the wreck of a French trawler, which had been used in connection with the whaling factory at Port Jeanne d'Arc. There was also evidence (worn out scrubbing brushes, straw bottle containers, and an empty bootblackening tin with German labels) that a German ship of some kind had used Kerguelen within the year. Before leaving Kerguelen, *Australia* laid a small number of magnetic mines there in case raiders subsequently visited the island.

³ *Kulmerland* later met the blockade runner *Spreewald* (5,083 tons) and handed the prisoners over to her. *Spreewald* was sunk in the Atlantic by a German submarine, and many of the prisoners, including Capt Skinner, among 26 of *Mareeba's* survivors, were lost.

⁴ Convoy US.13, escorted by *Canberra*, sailed from Fremantle on 8 November; escort was taken over by *Cornwall* from *Canberra* off Cocos Island. On her return voyage to Fremantle *Canberra* must have passed close to the raider.

He had much service in ships of the Royal Navy and came to me from them as my Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff a few months after the outbreak of war with high recommendations. These were not belied, for his capacity to grasp a situation rapidly and to formulate decisions was quite remarkable. His thoroughness, his appetite for hard work and his powers of organisation were invaluable, and he had a special faculty for getting at the heart of a problem and of stripping it of unessentials which is given to few.

Sydney's employment subsequent to Burnett's taking command was routine work. During May and June she escorted *Zealandia* to Malaya from Fremantle, handing over escort to H.M.S. *Danae* off Sunda Strait, and later taking over from *Danae* in the same position and escorting the troopship back to Fremantle. Towards the end of June she escorted a convoy, including *Zealandia*, to Sydney. July, August, and most of September she spent in the east, escorting to New Zealand and Suva, and patrolling off Melbourne. At the end of September she escorted convoy US.12B from the vicinity of Melbourne to Sunda Strait, and returned to Fremantle on the 7th October. There she was to be based for a while, and Burnett was told that she would be required about the 24th October to escort *Zealandia* to Singapore.

Zealandia, which had been on a trooping voyage to Port Moresby and Rabaul (Convoy ZK.4) returned to Sydney on the 13th October to embark troops for Malaya. Her departure thence was delayed for over a week owing to an industrial dispute with her engineers, and it was the 29th October when she eventually sailed, escorted by *Adelaide*, towards the west, where *Sydney* took over escort. On the 11th November, *Sydney* and *Zealandia* left Fremantle for Sunda Strait, where onward escort was to be taken over by H.M.S. *Durban*. *Sydney* signalled her expected time of arrival back at Fremantle as p.m. on the 19th or a.m. on the 20th November. This she later amended to Thursday, 20th November. That was the last heard from her. She did not arrive on the 20th, and the District Naval Officer, Western Australia, reported accordingly to the Naval Board at 11 a.m. the following day.⁵

This did not immediately cause concern. The arrival of *Zealandia* at Singapore was reported as some hours later than had been anticipated in Navy Office, and it was assumed that *Sydney* would be correspondingly late returning to Fremantle. There was also the possibility that she might have been diverted for some purpose, and had not broken wireless silence. When, however, she had not returned by the 23rd November, she was instructed by the Naval Board to report by signal. There was no reply. The following morning all high power wireless stations in Australia were instructed to call her continuously. There was no response; nor did an air search carried out that day by R.A.A.F. aircraft from Pearce, Western Australia, produce any positive result. The Commander-in-Chief, China, was then informed that *Sydney* was thirty-six hours overdue, and replied that she had handed over *Zealandia* to *Durban* off Sunda Strait at noon

⁵ Except for the account of the action, times used in this narrative are those of Eastern Australian time.

on the 17th. The Commander-in-Chief, Netherlands Navy, Admiral Helfrich, was thereupon requested by the Naval Board to carry out an air search south from Java; but within two hours of the despatch of that request came news. Shortly after 6 p.m. on the 24th the *Trocas*—the British tanker which *Stuart* had taken in tow when disabled in the Mediterranean—reported by wireless that she had picked up a raft carrying 25 German naval men in a position approximately 120 miles W.N.W. of Carnarvon.

Action was at once taken. Six merchant ships in the area, *Pan Europe*, *Saidja*, *Herstein*, *Sunetta*, *Centaur* and *Hermion*,⁶ were instructed to pass through the position of the raft found by *Trocas* and keep a lookout for other survivors. Four auxiliary naval vessels, *Yandra*,⁷ *Heros*,⁸ *Olive Cam*⁹ and *Wyrallah*,¹ were sailed from Fremantle to meet *Trocas* and then search the area. Aircraft were removed from Pearce to Carnarvon to search from there, and two R.A.A.F. Catalina flying-boats were transferred from North-Eastern Area to cover a wide ocean reconnaissance. Later on the 24th wireless stations were instructed to cease calling *Sydney*. It seemed clear that she had been in action, and the discovery by *Trocas* defined a search area that was closely and widely covered, by air from Australia and Java; by sea by merchant vessels and the naval vessels from Fremantle, and the Dutch cruiser *Tromp* which left Sunda Strait on the 25th to follow *Sydney's* track to 20 degrees south and then search towards Surabaya on the chance of the cruiser, damaged, making for that port. These searches, though negative regarding *Sydney*, quickly produced results.

By the 30th November six boats and two rafts had been found, either at sea or ashore near Carnarvon. They carried a total of 315 German officers and ratings (including twenty-six taken on to *Sydney* in the transport *Aquitania*) and two Chinese. They were survivors from *Kormoran*, which was sunk on the 19th November after being in action with H.M.A.S. *Sydney*.

It was by then known that thirty-three hours had been lost in the search through failure immediately to report the rescue, earlier than that of the *Trocas*, of German survivors from one of the rafts mentioned above. At 8.30 a.m. on the 24th November, *Aquitania*, bound from Singapore to Sydney, rescued twenty-six Germans from a raft in a position some forty-five miles south-west of where *Trocas* later met hers. From their accounts, *Aquitania's* captain gathered that the Germans' ship had been in action with a cruiser. He did not report immediately by wireless because he considered that the cruiser would herself have already reported, and he did not wish therefore to break wireless silence. Not until *Aquitania* passed Wilson's Promontory at 1.20 p.m. on the 27th and was able to

⁶ Of 9,468, 6,671, 5,100, 7,987, 3,222 and 5,202 tons respectively.

⁷ HMAS *Yandra* (1928), 990 tons, commnd 22 Sep 1940, one 4-in gun, 11 kts.

⁸ HMAS *Heros* (1919), 382 tons, commnd 3 Jul 1941, one 4-in gun, 12 kts.

⁹ HMAS *Olive Cam* (1920), 281 tons, commnd 6 Oct 1939, one 12-pdr gun, 9.5 kts.

¹ HMAS *Wyrallah* (1934), 1,049 tons, commnd 2 Sep 1940, one 4-in gun, 11 kts; name changed, in Feb 1942, to *Wilcannia*.

pass a visual signal, did the Naval Board learn that she had met the raft and had prisoners on board.

From *Sydney* herself no word was ever received, and only one small shell-torn float was found as tangible evidence of her loss, in spite of wide and thorough searching. The story of her last action was pieced together through exhaustive interrogation of *Kormoran's* survivors. No room was left for doubt as to its accuracy.

Just before 4 p.m.² on Wednesday, 19th November 1941, the German raider *Kormoran* was off the Western Australian coast, approximately 150 miles south-west of Carnarvon. There was a gentle S.S.E. wind and slight sea, a medium S.W. swell. The day was very clear, and visibility extreme. Nightfall was some three hours distant. *Kormoran*, with a complement of 393 officers and men, was steering N.N.E. at 11 knots. At 3.55 p.m. the lookout reported a sighting fine on the port bow. It was at first thought to be a sail, but was soon identified as a warship. At 4 p.m. Detmers—*Kormoran's* captain—sent his crew to action stations, altered course to W.S.W. into the sun, and ordered full speed—about 15 knots, which the temporary breakdown of one engine limited to 14 knots for about half an hour. The warship, now identified as a *Perth* class cruiser, steering southwards and some ten miles distant, altered towards and overhauled on a slightly converging course on *Kormoran's* starboard quarter. She made the letters NNJ continuously on her searchlight. To this *Kormoran* made no reply. When about seven miles distant, *Sydney* signalled to *Kormoran* by searchlight to hoist her signal letters.

Detmers hoped to avoid action by passing *Kormoran* off as a Dutch vessel. He therefore showed Dutch colours, and hoisted the flag signal PKQI for *Straat Malakka* on the triadic stay between the foremast and funnel. So placed it was difficult to read, and *Sydney* repeatedly signalled: "Hoist your signal letters clear." Ahlback, *Kormoran's* yeoman of signals, drew the halliards to the starboard side to make the flags more visible to *Sydney*. In the early stages *Kormoran* ranged *Sydney* on a 3-metre rangefinder, but when the cruiser, overhauling on the starboard quarter and showing a narrow silhouette, had approached to within five miles, this was discontinued for reasons of disguise, and a small rangefinder was used.

At 5 p.m., to further the deception, *Kormoran* broadcast a "suspicious ship" message in the name of *Straat Malakka*. This was picked up, faint and in mutilated form, by the tug *Uco*, and by Geraldton wireless station, at 6 p.m. Western Australian time (eight hours ahead of Greenwich, so that sending and receiving times tally, *Kormoran's* time being only seven hours ahead). In the mutilated portion read by Geraldton only the time and part of a position were readable, and there was no indication that it was a distress message. When, after ten minutes, there was no repetition, Geraldton broadcast all ships asking if there was anything to report. No reply was received. Apparently no significance was therefore attached to

² The Germans kept time for 105 east longitude, 7 hours ahead of Greenwich, and it is used in this account of the action.

the original message, of which the Naval Board did not learn until the 27th November.

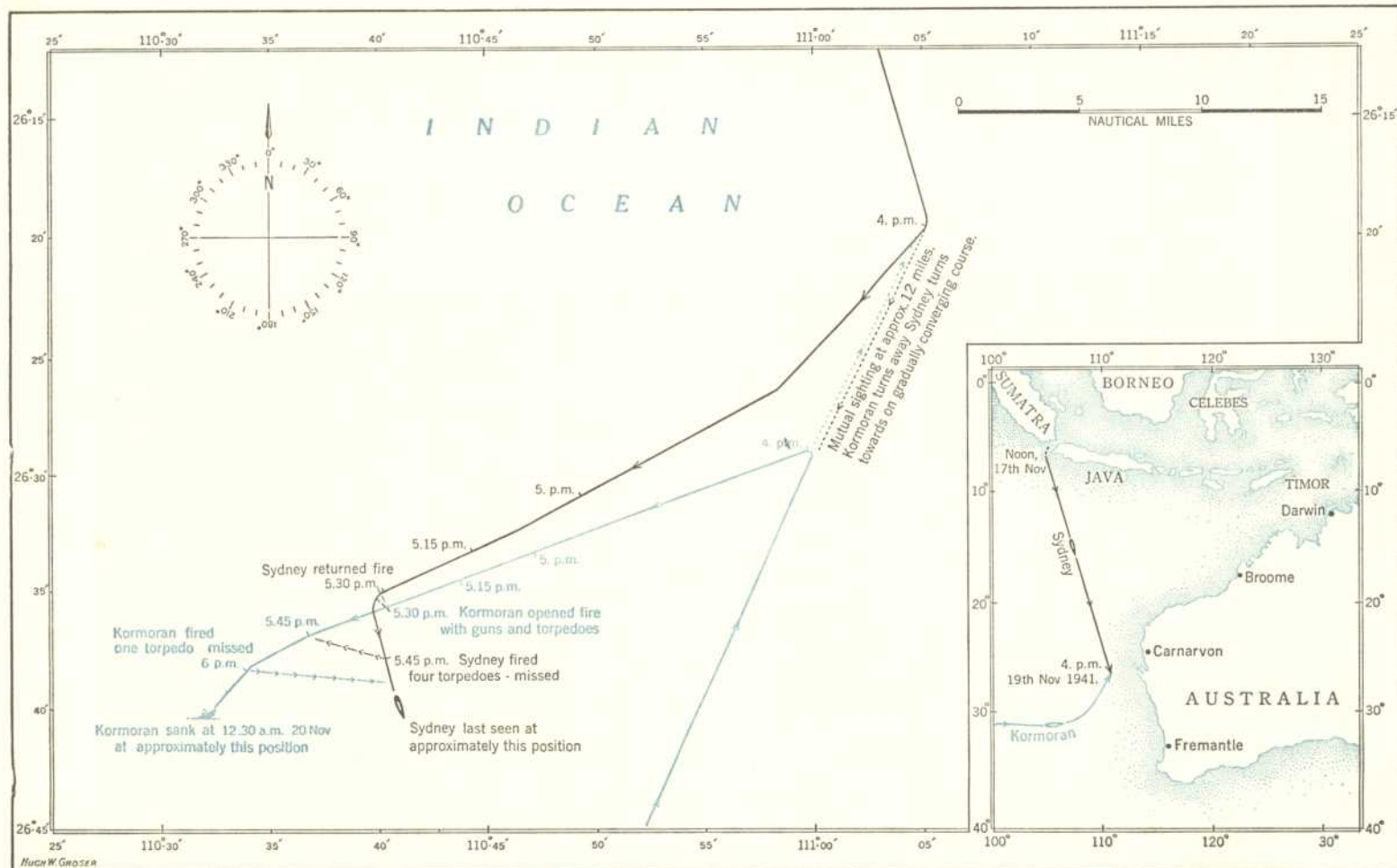
Soon after 5.15 p.m. *Sydney* had drawn almost abeam of *Kormoran* to starboard, less than a mile distant. Both ships were steering approximately W.S.W. at about 15 knots. The cruiser was at action stations with all guns and torpedo tubes bearing. Her aircraft was on the catapult with, apparently, the engine running. She signalled, both by flags and light: "Where bound?" *Kormoran* replied: "Batavia." The crucial moment was approaching. *Sydney* made a two-flag hoist, the letters IK, which the raider could not interpret. They were in fact (and their being quoted correctly under interrogation is corroboration of the German story) the centre letters of *Straat Malakka's* secret identification signal, which was unknown to the Germans. They made no reply.

Sydney then made by light the fateful signal: "Show your secret sign." It told Detmers that he would have to fight. He answered immediately by dropping all disguise, striking the Dutch colours and hoisting the German, and giving the order to open fire with guns and torpedoes. It was then 5.30 p.m.

Simultaneously with opening gun fire, *Kormoran* fired two torpedoes. Lieutenant Fritz Skeries, the raider's gunnery officer, directed the gunnery from the control position above the bridge in this last engagement. According to his and corroborative evidence, *Kormoran's* initial single gun ranging salvo at just over 1,400 yards was short. A second at 1,750 yards was over. Hits were scored, within about four seconds of opening fire, on *Sydney's* bridge and director tower, at a range of 1,640 yards. These were followed immediately by a full salvo from *Sydney* which went over and failed to hit. *Kormoran* again scored quickly with two salvos which hit *Sydney* on the bridge and amidships: "Fifth shot the cruiser's aeroplane (burnt)—motor ran and then shut off—shots fired systematically—lucky shot that aeroplane was hit."

The range was so short that *Kormoran* used her anti-aircraft machine-guns and starboard 3.7-inch guns effectively against *Sydney's* bridge, torpedo tubes, and anti-aircraft batteries. For a few seconds after her initial salvo *Sydney* did not reply. It would seem that her "A" and "B" (forward) turrets were put out of action (according to Skeries by *Kormoran's* third and fourth salvos); but after the raider's fifth or sixth salvo the cruiser's "X" turret (foremost of the two after turrets) opened fast and accurate fire, hitting *Kormoran* in the funnel and engine room. "Y" turret fired only two or three salvos, all of which went over. At about this time one of the raider's two torpedoes struck *Sydney* under "A" and "B" turrets. The other passed close ahead of the stricken ship, which was being repeatedly hit by shells.

Her stem low in the water, *Sydney* now turned sharply towards *Kormoran* as though attempting to ram. As she did so, the top of "B" turret flew overboard, blown up, Skeries said, by the raider's tenth salvo. The cruiser passed under *Kormoran's* stern, heading to the southward and losing way. *Kormoran*, maintaining her course and speed, was now on



Sydney-Kormoran Action

fire in the engine room where the hits by *Sydney's* "X" turret had caused severe damage. Smoke from the fire hid *Sydney* from *Kormoran's* bridge, but the raider continued to engage with her after guns at a range lengthening to approximately 4,400 yards.

At about 5.45 p.m. *Sydney* fired four torpedoes. Detmers was then turning to port to bring his broadside to bear, and as he did so *Kormoran's* engines began to fail. The torpedo tracks were sighted, but *Kormoran* just cleared them and they passed close astern. Simultaneously the raider's engines broke down completely. *Sydney*, crippled and on fire from the bridge to the after funnel, steamed slowly to the southward. Apparently her turrets were now out of action, but she continued to fire with her secondary armament, and Skeries stated: "Shots from 1-inch guns of cruiser mostly short." She was constantly hit by gun fire from the raider, whose forward control position was working with the port broadside in action at 5.50 p.m., when the range was about 6,600 yards. Ten minutes later, at a range of 7,700 yards, *Kormoran* fired one torpedo, which missed *Sydney* astern.

The action had then lasted half an hour. Both ships were crippled and on fire, the raider in the engine room, now untenable; and *Sydney* far more extensively. *Kormoran* fired her last shot at 6.25 p.m., at a range of about 11,000 yards. In all she fired 450 rounds from her main armament, and probably some hundreds from her anti-aircraft batteries. She was now in a bad way, her engines wrecked and her engine room ablaze, and with her full equipment of mines, some 200, still on board. Dusk was creeping from the eastward over a sea that was rising with a freshening breeze. At 6.25 p.m. Detmers ordered abandon ship, and lowered all boats and life-saving equipment. With the gathering gloom the form of *Sydney* disappeared from view, last seen about ten miles off, heading approximately S.S.E. Thereafter, until about 10 p.m., a distant glare in the darkness betokened her presence. Then occasional flickerings. Before midnight they, too, had gone.

By 9 p.m. most of *Kormoran's* boats and rafts were lowered, filled and cast off. Almost all the officers, and enough ratings to man the guns, remained on board while the final scuttling arrangements were made. At midnight, with smoke increasing heavily on the mining deck, the scuttling charge was fired, and the last boat cast off. Half an hour later the mines exploded, and *Kormoran* sank rapidly stern first. Of her complement of 393 officers and men, 78 lost their lives, about 20 killed in action on board and the remainder drowned through the capsizing of an overloaded raft. Two of the four Chinese from *Eurylochus* were also lost. Of *Sydney's* total complement of 42 officers and 603 ratings, not one survived.

The story of how *Sydney* was lost would appear to be straightforward. What induced Burnett to place her in the position where her loss in such a way was possible, must remain conjecture. Burnett had the usual peacetime sea experience of an R.A.N. officer on the permanent list, both in ships of the R.A.N. and on exchange with the Royal Navy; but by reason of his wartime appointment at Navy Office, and the employment of his

first wartime sea command in routine duties in an area which for nearly twelve months had known no enemy action, he lacked that experience which, gained in a recognised war zone, sharpens suspicion and counsels caution on all chance meetings. Yet, as Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff at Navy Office, he had participated as a behind-the-scenes-operator in the earlier raider attacks on or near the Australia Station. He would have realised that a repetition was always possible. From the fact that he went to action stations and approached *Kormoran* with his main armament and torpedo tubes bearing, it would seem that he had suspicions of her *bona fides*. If it were just a routine measure, other routine measures of greater importance in such a situation were neglected.

Why Burnett did not use his aircraft, did not keep his distance and use his superior speed and armament, did not confirm his suspicions by asking Navy Office by wireless if *Straat Malakka* was in the area, are questions that can never be answered. Three days after *Sydney* was lost, but before her loss became known, HMS *Devonshire* met the raider *Atlantis* in the South Atlantic. *Atlantis*, whose actions caused the deepest suspicions, claimed to be the Dutch *Polyphemus*, "and the possibility", said the report of the encounter, "of the suspicious movements and incoherent signals being due to our language and procedure had to be taken into account. From what little was known of the movements of *Polyphemus* it was not impossible for her to be in the area." In this doubt, *Devonshire* kept her distance at high speed and wirelessly the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic, asking if *Polyphemus* could be genuine. She had to wait for nearly an hour for a reply which came with dramatic suddenness: "No. Repetition No." *Devonshire* at once opened fire at 15,000 yards, and *Atlantis* was destroyed "helpless, outranged and outgunned so far as *Devonshire* was concerned".

The action of *Devonshire's* captain on this occasion was similar to that of Farncomb when *Canberra* met *Coburg* and *Ketty Brovig* the previous March; and were anything needed to emphasise the correctness of Farncomb's action then, the *Devonshire* incident provided the illustration.³ Yet Farncomb's report of his encounter, received in Navy Office in April 1941, was the subject of some comment and implied criticism by the Naval Staff. His report took the usual form of a narrative covering letter accompanying the detailed technical reports, and in itself made no mention of the expenditure of 215 rounds of 8-inch ammunition, though this was detailed in the attached gunnery report. Durnford, the Second Naval Member, who was Acting Chief of the Naval Staff in the absence in Singapore of Admiral Colvin, noted on Farncomb's letter on the 26th April: "This report discreetly makes no reference to ammunition expended. Is any further action suggested?" Four days later the letter was initialised by the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, Burnett, indicating that he had read the file, including Durnford's comment.

³ The distances kept by the two cruisers were not dissimilar—19,000 yards by *Canberra*, 15,000 yards by *Devonshire*.

Some weeks later a letter dated 2nd July 1941, commenting on the encounter, was received at Navy Office from Admiral Leatham, Commander-in-Chief, East Indies. Referring to the expenditure of ammunition, Leatham wrote:

It was correct that *Canberra* should have taken precautions against the possibility of the supposed raider firing torpedoes, but I think it was being over cautious to avoid approaching nearer than 19,000 yards on this account. Had a more effective range been attained quickly the enemy might have been identified sooner and much ammunition saved.

By the time this letter reached Navy Office, Burnett was away in command of *Sydney*, having been succeeded as Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff by Captain Getting. It is probable, however, that he knew of Leatham's comments, as a copy of Leatham's letter was sent, in August 1941, to the Rear-Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron. If, as is possible, Burnett's action in closing *Kormoran* was influenced by the implied criticism of Farncomb's standing off from *Ketty Brovig* and *Coburg*, one can but conjecture what he would have done had he known of *Devonshire's* experience. On the other hand, both Farncomb and *Devonshire's* captain had more positive reason for suspicion in their encounters than had Burnett in his; and it may well be that, influenced by the near approach of darkness, he was moved to determine the question quickly; and thus was swayed to over confidence; first in the genuineness of *Straat Malakka*; second in *Sydney's* ability, with all armament bearing and manned, to overwhelm before the trap, if such existed, were sprung. Yet to act as Burnett did was to court disaster should a trap exist, disaster at the worst total, as it was; at the best professional for Burnett; for even had *Sydney* triumphed in an action it is improbable that it would have been without damage and casualties, and Burnett would have been unable to explain the risks he ran.

In such an encounter, with the raider an apparently innocent merchant vessel, the other an undisguised warship known to the raider as an enemy, the element of surprise must have remained with Detmers until Burnett's suspicions deepened into absolute certainty. In the circumstances Burnett created, he could not have reached such certainty until Detmers abandoned all disguise and struck—a matter of almost simultaneous decision by him and action by his guns, giving him the tremendous advantage of that vital second or two in the first blow at such close quarters. In the event, *Sydney* must have been crippled from the outset by those devastating initial salvos at point blank range, the torpedo hit, and the fire from her aircraft's petrol. That she managed to inflict fatal wounds on her adversary after such staggering blows is evidence of the undefeated spirit of those who survived them, and who fought on in "X" and "Y" turrets, with the secondary armament, and at the torpedo tubes.

It is probable that *Sydney* sank during the night of the 19th-20th November 1941. Not only did she suffer the torpedo blow below water, but German survivors estimated that she received up to fifty shell hits on the

water line. She was not observed to blow up. The "occasional flickerings" just died to nothingness in the night. It is not surprising that there were no survivors, for after the punishment she received from shells and bullets, and the ravages of the fires on board, it is unlikely that much that could float remained. It is therefore probable that the delays in receiving information from the wireless stations of the receipt of *Kormoran's* mutilated "suspicious ship" message, and from *Aquitania* of the earlier rescue of survivors from *Kormoran*, unfortunate though they were, had no bearing on the ultimate fate of such of *Sydney's* complement as survived the actual fighting.

News of the action, and of the presumed loss of *Sydney*, was publicly released in an official statement by the Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, on the 30th November 1941. The next of kin had been informed by personal telegram three days earlier. Unfortunately, however, through failure to observe correct censorship procedure in which both the Naval Board in Melbourne and the Government in Canberra were equally culpable, leakage of information occurred on the 25th November and gave rise to rumours which circulated throughout Australia and caused deep distress to next of kin. The Naval Board were responsible in the failure to inform the Chief Publicity Censor and to request an adequately worded censorship instruction as soon as doubt arose regarding *Sydney* on the 23rd November. The Government at Canberra were responsible in that on the 25th November, without informing or consulting the Naval Board, they instructed the Chief Publicity Censor (Mr E. G. Bonney, who had succeeded Mr Jenkin in that appointment earlier in the year) to issue a censorship instruction "No reference press or radio to H.M.A.S. *Sydney*". Circulated to all newspapers and broadcasting stations through Australia, this implied that some misfortune had befallen *Sydney*, and started the rumours, which spread rapidly and which, in addition to the distress they caused, threw suspicion on the official statement when it was issued five days later. Nor did rumour end with the issue of that statement. For many months thereafter stories, either malicious or merely mischievous, of news received from survivors of *Sydney* in Japan, continued to emerge and circulate, causing pain and distress in a number of Australian homes.

Apparently the only material evidence of the loss of *Sydney* is an Australian naval type Carley life-float which, damaged by gun fire and containing two Australian naval life-belts, was recovered by H.M.A.S. *Heros* on the 27th November 1941 (eight days after the action) in a position approximately 160 miles north-west of Carnarvon. This life-float is preserved in the Australian War Memorial at Canberra.

On or about the 6th February 1942 a Carley float bearing the remains of a corpse was sighted off Christmas Island, where it was towed ashore and the body buried "with full military honours". It was at first thought that this might be from *Sydney*, but in the early post-war years, and after detailed investigation of all reports and descriptions of the float and its

occupant, the Director of Naval Intelligence at Navy Office (then Captain Oldham, R.A.N.) concluded that this could not be so.⁴

One of *Kormoran's* crew was a film photographer who took moving picture films, for records purposes, of actions in which the raider took part, and who filmed the action with *Sydney*. These films were, through his neglect, left on board the raider and went down with her.⁵ One of the raider's officers, Sub-Lieutenant List, also photographed the action with a "still" camera. He was in one of the boats which landed near Carnarvon, and hid his camera and films in a cave on the beach. Both during and after the war (in 1945), searches were made for this, but without success.

The survivors from *Kormoran* were held prisoners of war in Australia until the war ended. They were repatriated in January 1947, and sailed from Port Melbourne in the steamer *Orontes* on the 21st of that month. Across the pier from the ship in which they embarked lay the Dutch merchant vessel *Straat Malakka*.

VII

During the closing weeks of 1941 the moves to create an Eastern Fleet led to discussions and decisions as to the part to be played by Australian naval forces in the event of war with Japan. Formation of a balanced fleet was, as the Admiralty had stated, dependent on the availability of cruisers and destroyers, and these were numerically far short of over-all requirements. On the 12th November the War Cabinet (which the day previously had cabled to the British Government its assurances of full cooperation with Admiral Phillips in his responsible task) approved a recommendation by Admiral Royle that *Stuart*, *Voyager*, *Vendetta* and *Vampire* should be employed on the China Station to act as anti-submarine screen for *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*. At the same time they expressed the opinion that, in the event of war, the destroyers should return to Australian waters in conformity with the previous decision as to the minimum forces it was considered would then be necessary for local defence. Only one of the four destroyers, *Vampire*, was immediately ready for service. The other three were refitting, *Stuart* and *Voyager* in Australia, and *Vendetta* in Singapore.

Meanwhile negotiations were proceeding between the United States and British naval authorities regarding naval cooperation in the event of war, and a naval conference at Singapore was arranged to be held as soon as Admiral Phillips arrived there. United States views, as expressed by Admiral Stark, the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, were that all British

⁴ Australian naval Intelligence continued for some years a search for any information which would throw light on the fate of *Sydney's* company. The flimsiest stories were followed up, and the search ranged from Central Africa to Kerguelen, but without success.

⁵ On 8 Jan 1942 Capt Detmers visited the survivors of his ship's company in their prisoner of war camp in Victoria. The report of his guard was: "To one of the cooks he said: 'What happened to the film you took of the engagement?' Reply: 'It was left on board.' 'But you were one of the first men ordered to the boats and should have taken the film with you!' Then turning to me, the Commander said: 'This man filmed the whole engagement, but unfortunately left the film behind. It is a great pity, as the film would have explained the whole action and showed what happened, to the satisfaction of the Australian authorities and to ours.' "

forces in "the Indian waters, East Indies, Far East, Australian and New Zealand areas", except local defence forces, should be made integral parts of the Eastern Fleet, "the Commander-in-Chief thereof being responsible for reassigning parts of his forces to the regular forces under commanders of subordinate stations after the needs of the Far East area had been satisfied".

This disregarded the Australian view, which had been made clear and reiterated at the Singapore conferences, regarding the minimum forces considered necessary for local defence. The Australian Government thereupon produced a formula (which was endorsed by the Advisory War Council on the 26th November) setting out the minimum it could accept in agreeing to transfer the strategic control of H.M.A. Ships, other than local defence vessels, to the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet. It was that the following necessary protection should be given to vital commitments on the Australia Station:

- (1) Escort of Australian and New Zealand reinforcements (every 60 days);
- (2) Escort of air trainees (every 28 days);
- (3) Food and supplies to the Middle East and Malaya (every 36 days);
- (4) Seaborne trade in Australian waters, as this was vital to Australia's war effort (including Tasman convoys every 20 days);
- (5) Any other special commitment.

The Government stipulated that the protection afforded should be not less than that which would be given by Australian naval forces if control of these had been retained by the Commonwealth. It was also decided that Admiral Royle, while at Singapore, should enter into no commitment until he had submitted a report on his discussions to the Commonwealth Government. Royle, with his staff for the conference, sailed from Darwin on the 29th November in H.M.A.S. *Manoora*, and reached Singapore via Batavia on the 6th December.

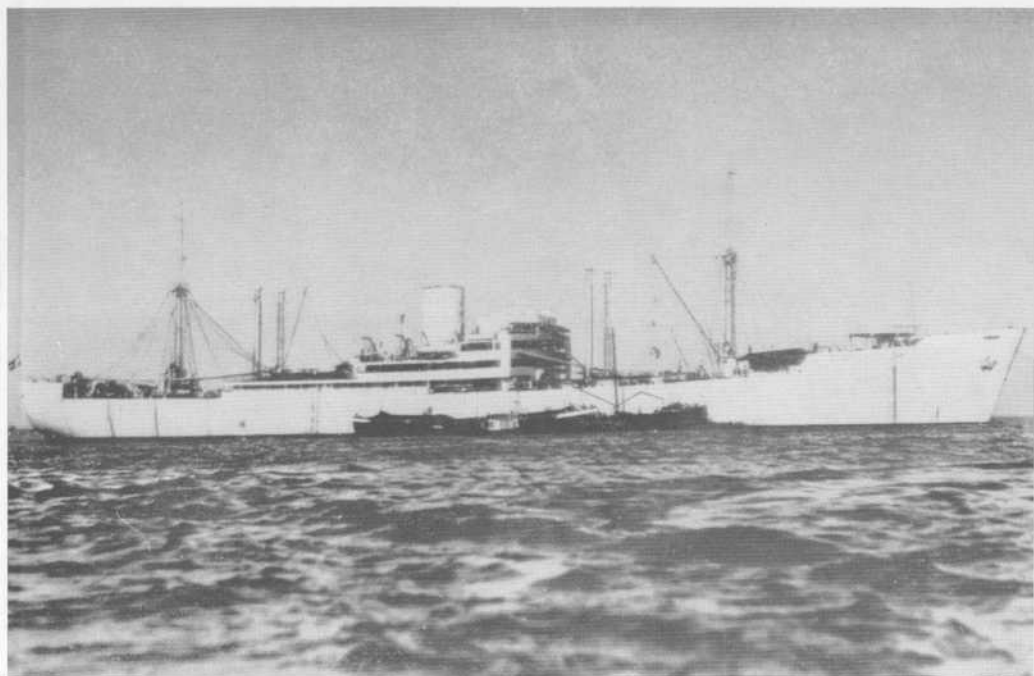
Meanwhile conversations continued between Japan and the United States, but with diminishing hopes of success. On the 5th November the Japanese Prime Minister, Tojo, sent the diplomatist Saburo Kurusu to Washington to help Nomura in the negotiations. Proposals and counter proposals were made, but neither side would give ground. The danger of an explosion was recognised by responsible persons, both American and Japanese. Early in November Mr Grew, the American Ambassador at Tokyo, told his Government that Japan's resort to measures which would make war inevitable might come with dramatic suddenness. Later in the month Tojo's envoys in Washington warned him that American temper was rising; but he refused their request for some measure of concession. Instead, on the 20th November, Nomura was given a note for the American Government which embodied Japan's "absolutely final proposal". It relinquished nothing of previous demands, and was unacceptable to America.

The American Chiefs of Staff, however, needed and asked their Government for time (convoys of troops to reinforce the Philippines were at sea in the Pacific) and an attempt to reach a "temporary arrangement

or *modus vivendi* to tide over the immediate crisis" was proposed within the American Government. The idea was dropped after it had been submitted to the British, Australian, Chinese and Netherlands Governments through their representatives in Washington, and had received only lukewarm support. The American Government then made a counter proposal, dated the 26th November, to the Japanese note. There was little hope that Tojo would consider it, and the following day Admiral Stark sent a "war warning" to Admirals Hart at Manila and Kimmel at Pearl Harbour, telling them that negotiations between the two countries had ceased, and an aggressive move by Japan was expected within the next few days.

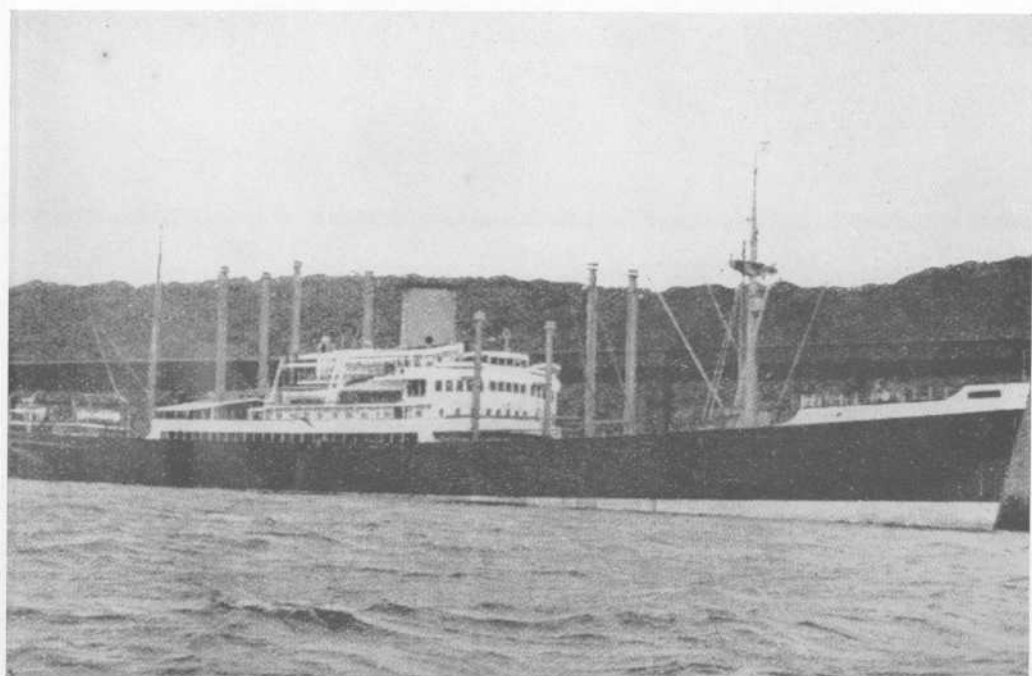
Prince of Wales and *Repulse*, with their four destroyers, reached Singapore on the 2nd December. Admiral Phillips, on Admiralty instructions, flew from Colombo to Singapore in advance of the force, and after conferring with Admiral Layton flew on to Manila, where he arrived on the 5th December for discussions with Admiral Hart and General Douglas MacArthur, Commanding General United States Army Forces in the Far East. By this time the Admiralty, aware of the deteriorating situation vis-à-vis Japan, were concerned about the exposed position of the two capital ships. On the 1st December (on which day, as was learned after the war, the final decision to go to war with the United States, Britain, and the Netherlands, was taken at an Imperial Conference at Tokyo) they cabled to Phillips suggesting that the ships might be sent away from Singapore. *Prince of Wales*, however, required a few days to make good defects, but on the 5th December *Repulse*, screened by the destroyers *Tenedos* and *Vampire*, sailed for Darwin.

On this day Britain received from the United States the long-awaited assurance of armed support—in certain contingencies—in the event of war in the Far East. One of the conditions was British intervention in Thailand, either to forestall a Japanese landing on the Kra Isthmus (the narrow neck connecting Malaya with mainland Asia) or as a reply to a violation of any other part of Thai territory. Such intervention had already been planned. In December 1940, shortly after assuming his appointment as Commander-in-Chief, Far East, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham had given consideration to a plan to occupy the southern part of the Kra Isthmus should the Japanese make an ostensibly peaceful penetration into Thailand. The matter was further advanced at a conference called by Brooke-Popham in August 1941, and a plan—with the code-name MATADOR—for the occupation of the Singora-Patani area to forestall the Japanese, was adopted. The British Chiefs of Staff, however, while agreeing that an advance into the Kra Isthmus would be the best counter to a Japanese overland threat to Malaya, pointed out that there could be no question of Allied forces operating in Thailand before that country had been invaded by the Japanese. There could be no sanction beforehand to an advance to Singora from Malaya, and MATADOR could not be implemented without reference to Whitehall. When, however, on the 5th December, the American assurance of armed support was at last received, the Chiefs of Staff authorised Brooke-Popham to order MATADOR without further refer-



German Raider *Kormoran*.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



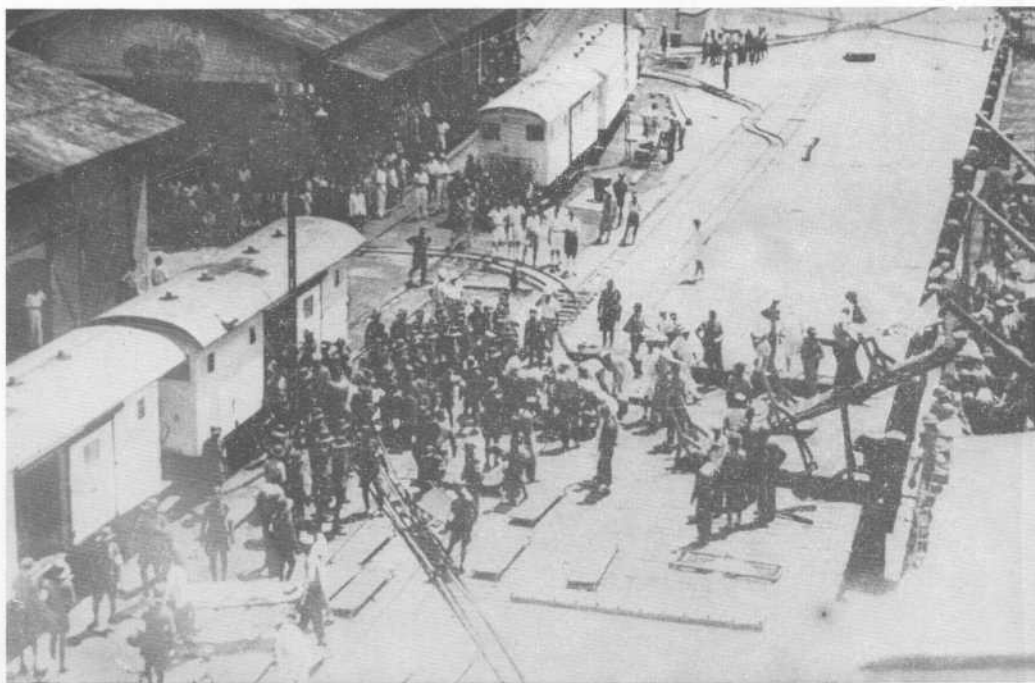
Dutch Merchant Ship *Straat Malakka*.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



(U.S. Navy)

Japanese Battleship *Yamato*—Flagship of Admiral Yamamoto, C-in-C Combined Fleet.



(U.S. Navy)

Wounded from U.S.S. *Marblehead* being placed on Hospital Train at Tjilatjap 6th February 1942.

ence to them should the Japanese violate any part of Thailand, or if there were good information that a Japanese expedition was advancing with the apparent intention of landing on the Kra Isthmus.

The next day, at about 11.30 a.m., air reconnaissance from Malaya reported having sighted Japanese convoys of warships and transports south and south-east of Point Camo, south Indo-China. The report was later amplified as three convoys, one of three merchant vessels with a cruiser as escort, in position about eighty miles south of Point Camo and heading north-west into the Gulf of Siam; one of twenty-two merchant ships escorted by one battle cruiser, five cruisers and seven destroyers; and one of twenty-one merchant ships, escorted by two cruisers and ten destroyers. These two large convoys (in reality only one, twice sighted) were some 100 miles south-east of Point Camo, steering west. Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, in consultation with Admiral Layton, concluded that the west-bound convoys would probably, on rounding Point Camo, follow the leading four ships north-west into the Gulf of Siam, there to demonstrate against and bring pressure to bear on Thailand, and would not continue on their present course to the Kra Isthmus. As Brooke-Popham later wrote:

Bearing in mind the policy of avoiding war with Japan if possible—a policy which had been reaffirmed by the Chiefs of Staff as recently as the 29th November—and the situation in the United States with the Kurusu talks still going on in Washington, I decided that I would not be justified in ordering MATADOR on this information.⁶

However, all forces were brought to first degree readiness, and continued attempts, frustrated by bad weather, were made to re-establish visual aerial contact with the Japanese convoys. One Catalina flying-boat, sent to shadow the convoys during the night, did possibly sight one on the 7th December, but, from subsequent Japanese accounts, was shot down before it could report its discovery.

On hearing of the sighting of the convoys on the 6th December, Admiral Phillips at once left Manila for Singapore, and *Repulse* and her destroyers were ordered to return there with all dispatch. Ships and admiral reached there on the 7th December.

At about midnight that night, without formal declaration of war, Japanese forces invaded northern Malaya from the sea, and Thailand from the sea and from Indo-China. Almost simultaneously they struck the American Pacific Fleet a devastating blow in Pearl Harbour with bombs and torpedoes from carrier-borne aircraft; and a few hours later made air attacks on the Philippine Islands. Full scale war, with its direct threat to Australia, had come to the Far East.

⁶ Brooke-Popham, *Despatch on Operations in the Far East, from 17th October 1940 to 27th December 1941*.

CHAPTER 13

WAR IN THE FAR EAST

THE High Command of the Japanese Navy did not lightly enter upon the Pacific war, nor were they unduly confident of the outcome. It was subsequently learned that they knew they were entering a battle for sea communications; and appreciated the extent of the sea power wielded by their prospective adversaries. They considered, however, that the great distances of the Pacific Ocean would be a factor in their favour, and pinned their hopes of success on the assumption that they could at the outset secure command of the Western Pacific and, with interior lines of communication and the establishment of boundary defences, isolate and hold it so as to ensure, at the least, a negotiated peace favourable to Japan. In effect, the Japanese aspired to do with an ocean area what the Germans aspired to do with a continental land mass; to make of it a secure, self-contained fortress within geographical limits of their own determination and then, if unable to achieve outright victory by the complete military defeat of their enemies, to so sap their strength and endurance as to force them to come to terms.

This, however, was to start from a false premise; for in a world war it is impossible for any but the dominant sea power to "take as much and as little of the war as he will";¹ and Japan, who was not in that position, sought to limit her activities to a very small proportion of that three-fifths of the earth's surface which the seas occupy.

The deciding voice in the shaping of Japan's naval strategy was Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet. Born in 1883, Yamamoto was a graduate of the Naval Academy and Naval Staff College. A midshipman at the time of the Russo-Japanese war, he reached flag rank in 1929. A specialist in naval aviation, he was Chief of the Technical Division, Department of Naval Aeronautics, in 1930, and became Commanding Admiral, *1st Air Squadron*, in 1933. During the next six years he was, as Vice-Admiral, Chief of the Department of Naval Aeronautics and, from 1936 to 1939 was also Vice-Minister of the Navy. Appointed Commander-in-Chief, Combined Fleet, in August 1939, he was promoted admiral the following year. His preoccupation with naval aviation was to have far-reaching results. In the successful British attack on the Italian fleet at Taranto he had tangible evidence of its potency and ability to alter the balance of naval power at a single stroke. Described as a radical nationalist, he was very active politically, and was regarded in 1939 as a candidate for the Premiership. He is said to have been shrewd but of a generous nature, and pro-British in outlook.

There is no doubt that Yamamoto was fully seized with the dangers his

¹ Francis Bacon, *Essays—Of Expense*: "Thus much is certain: that he that commands the sea is at great liberty, and may take as much and as little of the war as he will."

country faced in resorting to war; and from the outset he was opposed to it as being suicidal for Japan. He resisted Japan's entry into the Tripartite Pact in September 1940, by which she formally joined in a treaty of alliance with Germany and Italy. Soon after the pact was concluded he told the Premier, Prince Konoye, that he hoped he would try to avoid war, and that if Japan went to war her navy would "carry through for one year, some way; but after that I don't know".² He knew that once war began there could be no half measures, and is reported to have said: "I hope that the Japanese Army realises that if this war is to be won it will be necessary to carry the fight into the heart of the United States and to dictate peace terms in the White House."

Yamamoto held that in the event of war Japan's only hope lay in an early victory, and that the destruction of the United States Pacific Fleet was a prerequisite thereto. Accordingly, with the threat of war increasing after the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact, he, in January 1941, ordered "his own staff and Rear-Admiral Onishi, Chief of Staff of the *XI Air Fleet*",³ to study his concept of a surprise carrier-borne air attack on Pearl Harbour. No one else was taken into the secret until the table top exercises at the Naval College, Tokyo, in September 1941, when Admiral Nagano, Chief of the Naval General Staff, and the members of that staff first learned of the project.

Until then the Japanese plan in the event of war was to proceed with the conquest of the rich southern regions. If the United States attempted to intervene, the Pacific Fleet would be harried on its passage west by all possible means, and would be met in a weakened condition, far from its bases, by a superior Japanese main fleet, and destroyed in waters near Japan. Nagano and several members of the General Staff wished to adhere to this plan, and opposed the Pearl Harbour attack in that it would bring America into the war, and was in any case too risky an operation. However they were overruled by Yamamoto and his supporters, who argued that the United States would enter the war in any case, and that as Japan had the ships and aircraft to carry out both the Pearl Harbour and southward attacks simultaneously, it would be foolish to let the opportunity pass.

Accordingly the Pearl Harbour attack became part of the Combined Fleet Secret Operation Order No. 1 of the 1st November 1941. This order detailed the navy's part in a far-reaching plan which was, as a preliminary and without a declaration of war, to invade Thailand, destroy the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour, and attack Malaya and the Philippines by air. The Japanese forces would then proceed with the conquest of Malaya and Singapore, the Philippines, Borneo, Sumatra, and the whole of the Netherlands East Indies. These conquests would be secured by a "ribbon defence" running from the Kurile Islands in the north, through

² According to Admiral Toyoda (Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, July-October 1941) in post-war interrogation.

³ S. E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol III (1948), p. 83.

Wake Island, the Marshall Islands, and around the southern and western edges of the Malay Barrier, to the Burmese-Indian border.

The basic plan was the conquest and securing of the southern regions. The Pearl Harbour attack was complementary but subordinate to it, designed to hasten the destruction of the Pacific Fleet and thus give a freer hand in the southern advance. The conquest of Hawaii was never considered. Should the Pearl Harbour attack fail to destroy or seriously injure the Pacific Fleet, the Japanese naval plan was to prosecute operations in the southern regions with minimum strength, and revert to the original plan of harrying the Pacific Fleet in any attempt to intervene and then fight a decisive fleet action with superior force. It was appreciated that it would probably be necessary rapidly to concentrate decisive battle strength which might be dispersed supporting invasions or taking part in combined operations but there was no detailed provision for this in the plans. However, to provide for possible American attacks on the southern area task forces, some twenty large Japanese submarines operating in the Hawaii area were placed under the command of the task forces commander (Vice-Admiral Kondo, Commander-in-Chief, *Second Fleet*), and the main battle force under the direct control of Yamamoto in its Inland Sea bases was made responsible for providing cover as necessary.

To carry their plans into operation the Japanese possessed a powerful, balanced fleet, with a large and efficient air arm. Its main units were six fleet and four light fleet aircraft carriers; eleven battleships; eighteen 8-inch gun cruisers; twenty-one cruisers with 6-inch or smaller guns (including three modern vessels of the *Kashii* class rated as sea-going training ships); about 100 fleet destroyers; and 63 submarines, of which 42 were large operational type, ranging between 1,600 and 2,400 tons, 17 were coastal type, and four were minelayers.

Of the six fleet carriers, *Akagi* and *Kaga*, 36,000 tons, were converted battle cruisers built in the 1920's, with speeds around 28 knots; *Soryu* and *Hiryu*, of 17,500 tons and 30 knots, were completed in the late 1930's; *Zuikaku* and *Shokaku*, laid down in 1938 and completed just before Japan entered the war, were of 30,000 tons and 30 knots. The large fleet carriers normally carried about 60 aircraft, of which 27 were fighters and the remainder torpedo bombers or bombers. Of the four light fleet carriers, *Ryujo* and *Hosho* were of 8,500 tons, and *Zuiho* and *Shoho* of 12,000 tons. Their normal complement was 20 to 24 aircraft, about half of which were fighters. In addition to the aircraft carriers there were two squadrons of seaplane carriers totalling nine (possibly more) ships, of which four were converted merchant vessels. In all they could carry some 120 seaplanes; while approximately 80 were carried in the battleships and cruisers of the Combined Fleet. Land-based aircraft formed an integral part of Japan's naval establishment, and cooperated closely with carrier-borne aircraft where circumstances permitted. The bulk of the combat strength of the shore-based naval air force was contained in the *XI Air Fleet*.

Two of the battleships, *Nagato* and *Mutsu*, were built in the early 1920's.

Of 37,500 tons, they mounted eight 16-inch guns and had a speed of 25 knots. With the same speed but slightly smaller (34,500 tons) and mounting twelve 14-inch guns, *Fuso*, *Ise*, *Hyuga* and *Yamashiro*, were built during the 1914-18 war. The remaining four, of the older ships, *Kongo*, *Kirishima*, *Haruna* and *Hiyei*, built just before and during that war, were of 31,000 tons, and were the most lightly armed, with eight 14-inch guns (though, having been built as battle cruisers, they had a speed of 30 knots). All ten ships were completely modernised during the 1930's. Just before the outbreak of war the battle fleet was joined by the largest and most powerful battleship in existence, the newly-commissioned *Yamato* of 63,000 tons, with a main armament of nine 18.1-inch guns.⁴ Laid down in 1937, she was the first of three similar vessels. Her sister ship *Musashi* commissioned a year later. Construction of the third, *Shinano*, began in 1940, but her design was altered and she was completed in November 1944 as an aircraft carrier (and in that same month was sunk in the Inland Sea by the American submarine *Archerfish*).

The eighteen 8-inch gun cruisers were built between 1922 and 1939. The earliest four, *Kako*, *Furutaka*, *Aoba* and *Kinugasa*, were of 8,800 tons and mounted six guns in their main armament. Eight later ships, *Nachi*, *Myoko*, *Haguro*, *Ashigara*, *Takao*, *Atago*, *Maya* and *Chokai*, were completed in the late 1920's or early 1930's, were of between 12,000 and 13,000 tons, and mounted ten 8-inch guns. Also mounting ten 8-inch guns were six more modern ships, *Mogami*, *Mikuma*, *Suzuya*, *Kumano*, *Tone* and *Chikuma*. Built during the 1930's, they too were ships of between 12,000 and 13,000 tons. Fifteen smaller ships of around 6,000 tons (except *Yubari*, which was of 3,500 tons) and mounting seven 5.5-inch guns, were built during the 1920's: *Kuma*, *Kitagami*, *Kiso*, *Oi*, *Tama*, *Nagara*, *Natori*, *Kinu*, *Isuzu*, *Yura*, *Yubari*, *Sendai*, *Naka*, *Jintsu*, and *Abukuma*. Of these the five first-named had their guns reduced to four 5.5-inch just before the war in order to make room for forty 24-inch torpedo tubes in each ship. Speeds of all these cruisers, 8-inch and 5.5-inch, ranged between 32 and 36 knots according to their various classes. There were two smaller ships, *Tenryu* and *Tatsuta*, of 3,300 tons, which, completed in 1919, mounted four 5.5-inch guns and had a speed of 32 knots. Also used for certain light cruiser duties were the "sea-going training ships" *Kashii*, *Katori*, and *Kashima*. Built between 1938 and 1941, they were of 6,000 tons, mounted four 5.5-inch guns, and had eight 21-inch torpedo tubes, but were of only 18 knots. Latest and largest of the light cruisers was the *Noshiro* which, built 1939-41, was of 7,000 tons, 35 knots, and mounted six 6.1-inch guns. Compared with British standards the Japanese tended to over-gun their cruisers at the expense of armoured protection (but it turned out that their ships took comparable punish-

⁴ *Yamato*, Jap battleship; 63,000/72,200 tons; length 863 ft; beam at wl, 121 ft; nine 18.1-inch 162-ton guns firing a 3,220 lb shell at a maximum elevation of 40 degrees ranging 45,960 yds; average rate of fire three rounds in two minutes. Sunk off Kyushu, 7 Apr 1945.

ment, probably due to greater subdivision). Squadrons were usually of two to four ships commanded by a rear-admiral.⁵

There were approximately 100 fleet destroyers, about half of which were ships of from 1,300 to 2,000 tons, armed with five or six 5-inch guns and eight 24-inch torpedo tubes, and built during the 1930's. Slightly earlier than these were the 23 ships of the *Fubuki* class, of 1,950 tons, mounting six 5-inch guns and nine 24-inch tubes. Thirty-three older vessels of the *Kamikaze*, *Minekaze*, and *Mutsuki* classes were of from 1,200 to 1,500 tons and mounted four 4.7-inch guns and six 21-inch tubes. All fleet destroyers were of from 34 to 35 knots. There were also ten second-class destroyers of around 800 tons, armed with three 4.7-inch guns and with a speed of 31.5 knots. The normal strength of destroyer flotillas was two or four divisions of four ships each, with a light cruiser as flotilla leader.

There were 63 submarines, 22 of which were cruising boats of around 2,000 tons mounting one or two 5.5-inch guns and six 21-inch torpedo tubes; while 20 were fleet submarines mounting one 4.7-inch gun and six (eight in the 8 boats of the *I 153* class) 21-inch torpedo tubes. Speeds of these *I* class cruising and fleet boats were from 8 knots submerged to around 20 on the surface. A number of the larger boats were equipped to carry a small float plane or a midjet two-man submarine.

In 1941 the Japanese merchant fleet totalled 5,916,000 tons of steel vessels of 500 gross tons and over, and about 1,197,000 tons of wooden junks called *kihansen*. During the 1930's Japan largely replaced old and slow merchant ships with new and fast ones,⁶ and in 1940 she had over 700 ocean-going cargo ships, 132 combination passenger-cargo ships, and 49 large ocean-going tankers. Nearly 300 of her cargo ships were of 12 knots or over, and of the 132 combination passenger-cargo vessels, 49 had speeds of 15 knots or more and included some of the fastest merchant ships afloat. Among them were sixteen vessels quickly convertible to armed merchant cruisers. A comparatively low proportion of the merchant fleet was, however, of individually big ships.

Excepting aircraft carriers, Japan's potential enemies could, in December 1941, muster in the Pacific and Indian Oceans naval strength comparable to her own in numbers and types, but generally less powerful ship for ship. There were in the Pacific three American aircraft carriers of as great a carrying capacity, and faster than the best Japanese fleet types. Of these, *Enterprise* and *Lexington* were based on Pearl Harbour,

⁵ In the post-war Japanese publication "Japanese Naval Vessels At the End of the War", tonnages are largely given as those of "trial displacement"—this displacement covering "condition of vessel fully equipped and ready for sea with two-thirds stowage of stores and fuel, and full stowage of ammunition". This tonnage is approximately, in each instance, one-seventh greater than the tonnages here shown, i.e. battleship *Nagato*, tonnage here shown 37,500 tons; "trial tonnage" as shown in the Japanese publication, 43,000 tons.

⁶ Japan's building of new merchant ships of over 100 gross tons was:

1937 . . .	442,382 tons	1940 . . .	279,816 tons
1938 . . .	410,644 tons	1941 . . .	237,617 tons
1939 . . .	343,526 tons		

The gradual fall off was due to diversion of steel and shipyards to the construction of naval vessels.

and *Saratoga*⁷ was on the West Coast of America. Eight American battleships—*Nevada*, *Arizona*, *Tennessee*, *West Virginia*, *Maryland*, *Oklahoma*, *California*, and *Pennsylvania*—were based on Pearl Harbour, and one, *Colorado*, was on the West Coast. Of these, *Colorado*, *Maryland* and *West Virginia* each mounted eight 16-inch guns and the remainder twelve (ten in *Nevada* and *Oklahoma*) 14-inch guns. In classes and in age they about matched their Japanese opposite numbers, but were of only 21 knots speed. There was also the British battleship *Prince of Wales*, mounting ten 14-inch guns and with a speed of 28.5 knots, at Singapore, together with the battle-cruiser *Repulse*, with six 15-inch guns and a speed of 29 knots.

America had thirteen 8-inch gun cruisers in the Pacific, twelve—*Indianapolis*, *Chicago*, *Portland*, *Astoria*, *Northampton*, *Salt Lake City*, *Chester*, *Pensacola*, *Minneapolis*, *Louisville*, *New Orleans*, and *San Francisco*—based on Pearl Harbour, and *Houston* in the Philippines. Each mounted nine or ten guns in the main armament, and had a speed of about 32.5 knots. There were also in the Pacific three British, four Dutch, and nine American 6-inch gun cruisers. The British ships, *Danae*, *Durban* and *Dragon*, built in 1918, were of 4,850 tons, mounted six 6-inch guns, but were of only 29 knots. Of the Dutch ships, which were based on the Netherlands East Indies, *Java* and *Sumatra* were 6,670 tons, mounted ten 5.9-inch guns, and had a speed of 31 knots. The other two, built during the 1930's, were *De Ruyter*, of 7,548 tons with seven 5.9-inch guns and a speed of 32 knots; and *Tromp*, of 3,350 tons, with six 5.9-inch guns and of 33 knots speed. Ship for ship, the Americans had the lead over the Japanese in light cruisers. Four of them—*Helena*, *St Louis*, *Phoenix* and *Honolulu*—were of 9,700 tons, mounted fifteen 6-inch guns and had a speed of 32.5 knots, while *Detroit* and *Raleigh* were of 7,050 tons, with ten 6-inch guns and 34 knots. These six were based on Pearl Harbour. Two others, *Boise* and *Marblehead*, representatives respectively of the two classes mentioned above, were in the Philippines. Another three, including *Trenton* and *Richmond* of the 7,050 tons ten-gun class, were on the West Coast.

In all, the British, Dutch and Americans could muster upwards of ninety destroyers in the Pacific. The British had eleven, of which five were local defence vessels and three were under repair. The Dutch had six based on the Netherlands East Indies. Also in the Western Pacific were thirteen American destroyers with the United States Asiatic Fleet; these were all over-age destroyers of the first world war. In mid-Pacific were forty-eight destroyers with the Pacific Fleet, and a further nine were on the West Coast. Most modern of these destroyers were the American, the majority of those with the Pacific Fleet being of the *Farragut*, *Mahan* and *Gridley* classes, built during the 1930's, of around 1,400-1,500 tons, armed with four or five 5-inch guns and eight, twelve, or sixteen 21-inch torpedo tubes, and with speeds of 36.5 knots. The British and Dutch

⁷ *Enterprise* (1938), 19,800 tons and 34 kts, carried 81-85 aircraft; *Lexington* and *Saratoga* (1937), 33,000 tons, 33.25 kts, 81 aircraft.

vessels were older and less heavily armed, comparable with the older Japanese destroyers.

There were about 64 Dutch and American submarines in the Pacific; 15 based on the Netherlands East Indies, and 49 American—29 with the Asiatic Fleet and 11 based on Pearl Harbour, and nine on the West Coast.

In addition to the forces in the Pacific; there were one British 8-inch gun cruiser, *Exeter*;⁸ and three 6-inch gun cruisers on the east side of the East Indies Station, mainly employed in escorting Indian Ocean convoys; one 8-in gun cruiser, *Canberra*, and two 6-inch gun cruisers, *Perth* and *Adelaide*; and two destroyers, *Stuart* and *Voyager*; on the Australia Station; and a further two 6-inch gun cruisers, *Achilles* and *Leander*, on the New Zealand. Also on the Australia Station was the Free French "contre torpilleur" *Le Triomphant* (2,569 tons) which had reached Sydney from America in November.

In the balance of forces the Japanese were well placed to seize the initiative. They were more than twice as strong as their prospective opponents in aircraft carriers. Their battle line was greatly strengthened by *Yamato*, superior in range, strength, and armament to any battleship that could be opposed to her. Their forces were concentrated, under unified command, using a common code of signals and communications, well-trained and exercised in fleet tactics, close to their home bases, and with strong advance bases strategically placed in forward operational areas. Moreover, they had the support of powerful land-based naval air forces which could at once strike a number of prospective enemy bases in the Western Pacific, and give effective cover to their own surface fleets.

In contrast the British-American-Dutch naval forces were widely dispersed, lacked unified command, and used different codes of signals and communications (with the additional handicap of the language difficulty as between English and Dutch speaking), had no joint tactical training, operated from widely separated and, in most instances, highly vulnerable bases, and were numerically weakest in the area where strength was most needed—the Western Pacific. Little land-based air support was available to them there, and no carrier-borne.

II

The Japanese were well situated geographically to carry out their plan of attack and pursue it to its dangerously circumscribed limits. The conclusion of the non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union freed Japan's north-western flank. The whole of Indo-China was now under her domination. She had defence in considerable depth to her east in the island string of naval and air bases reaching from the Kuriles southward to the Marshall Islands. With her centralised naval and air superiority she could quickly establish command of the whole sea area enclosed between these western and eastern limits down to the Malay Barrier. If she could capture

⁸ HMS *Exeter*, cruiser (1931), 8,390 tons, six 8-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 32 kts; sunk in Battle of Java Sea, 1 Mar 1942.

Singapore she could seal off entry from the Indian Ocean. If she could shatter American naval power in the Pacific in an initial blow she could make herself secure from the east also, at any rate for a considerable time. The fatal weakness of the plan was that she confined herself within a limited area with limited and diminishing means of replenishing a wasting war economy; while perforce leaving to her enemies the control of the main ocean communications along which to mobilise their world-wide resources against her.

On the eve of her entry into the war, Japan's naval forces were strategically disposed to strike the initial blows. Under the direct control of Yamamoto, the main covering force was in home waters at Hiroshima Bay; the *1st Battle Squadron*, *Yamato* (Flag), *Mutsu* and *Nagato*; *2nd Battle Squadron*, *Ise*, *Hyuga*, *Fuso* and *Yamashiro*; light fleet carriers *Hosho* and *Zuiho*; light cruisers *Kitagami* and *Oi*; and destroyers. At sea in the northern Pacific, on its way to the aircraft launching position about 200 miles north of Hawaii, was the Pearl Harbour striking force and its support group, under the command of Vice-Admiral Nagumo, Commander-in-Chief, *First Air Fleet*. This force left Hitokappu Bay, Etorofu (largest of the Kurile Islands) on the 26th November, and consisted of the *1st Carrier Squadron*, *Akagi* (Flag), *Kaga*; *2nd Carrier Squadron*, *Soryu*, *Hiryu*; *5th Carrier Squadron*, *Zuikaku*, *Shokaku*; *1st Division 3rd Battle Squadron*, *Hiyei*, *Kirishima*; *8th Cruiser Squadron*, *Tone*, *Chikuma*; and nine destroyers with their light cruiser leader *Abukuma*. Also at sea on their way to Midway were the destroyers *Akebono* and *Ushio* of the *Midway Demolition Unit*; while bound from Kwajalein in the Marshalls were about twenty submarines of the Advance Expeditionary Force. Eleven carried small float planes, and five bore midget submarines of the *Special Naval Attack Unit*, whose mission was to raid Pearl Harbour. The duties of the large boats were patrolling and scouting off Hawaii, Samoa, and Fiji.

In command of the *Southern Area Fleet* which was to carry out the widely flung operations in the South Western Pacific was Vice-Admiral Kondo, Commander-in-Chief, *Second Fleet*, whose forces were disposed in advanced bases ready for the assault on Malaya and the Philippines. At Mako in the Pescadores, some 350 miles north of Luzon, was Kondo himself with the main covering force, *2nd Division 3rd Battle Squadron*, *Kongo*, *Haruna*; *1st Division 4th Cruiser Squadron*, *Atago* (Flag), *Takao*; and 12 destroyers, under his direct command. The Malaya Invasion Force was concentrated at Samah, Hainan Island (some 1,000 miles from its objective) and was under the command of Vice-Admiral Ozawa in the heavy cruiser *Chokai*. It consisted of a close covering force of the *7th Cruiser Squadron* under Rear-Admiral Kurita in *Kumano*, with *Mikuma*, *Mogami*, and *Suzuya*; light cruisers *Sendai* and *Kashii*; 13 destroyers; the seaplane tenders *Kamikawa Maru* and *Sanyo Maru*; two submarines of the *6th Flotilla* (which left Samah on the 1st December to patrol off Palembang Strait and the entrance to Manila Harbour); and 19 transports. In waters to the east of Malaya, eight submarines of the *4th Flotilla* (light

cruiser *Kinu*, flag) and four of the *5th Flotilla* (light cruiser *Yura*, flag) were disposed with the mission of "warning towards Singapore".

The Philippine Invasion Forces, under the command of Vice-Admiral Takahashi, Commander-in-Chief *Third Fleet*, were concentrated at Mako in the Pescadores and at Palau in the Carolines. Takahashi was at Mako with a covering force *Ashigara* (Flag), *Maya*, *Kuma*, and two destroyers. Also at Mako were the invasion forces for northern Luzon. The Aparri force, of six transports with an escorting force of six destroyers, was commanded by Rear-Admiral Hara in the light cruiser *Natori*; and the Vigan force of six transports, with an escorting force of seven destroyers, was under Rear-Admiral Nishimura in *Naka*. There was also a number of submarine chasers and minesweepers to operate with each invasion force. The Palau group was intended for Legaspi, Southern Luzon, and was of seven transports with escort of six destroyers commanded by Rear-Admiral Kubo in light cruiser *Nagara*; the seaplane carriers *Chitose* (Flag) and *Mizuho* of the *11th Seaplane Tender Division* under Rear-Admiral Fujita, with two minesweepers and other small craft; three minelayers, *Itsukushima* (Flag), *Yaeyama*, and *Tatsumiya Maru* under Rear-Admiral Kobayashi. The Palau covering force, commanded by Rear-Admiral Takagi, was made up of the heavy cruisers *Myoko* (Flag), *Nachi* and *Haguro*, of the *5th Cruiser Squadron*; the light fleet carrier *Ryujo* of the *4th Air Flotilla*, with one destroyer; and six destroyers led by light cruiser *Jintsu*. Some 300 miles north of Luzon, at Takao and Horyo in Formosa, was the Batan Island Surprise Attack Force under Rear-Admiral Hirose flying his flag in the destroyer *Yamagumo*, with four motor torpedo boats, submarine chasers, minesweepers and patrol craft.

Far away to the eastward of these Southern Area forces, at Hahajima in the Bonin Islands; at Kwajalein in the Marshalls; and at Truk in the Carolines; the Japanese *Fourth Fleet* (Mandates) was disposed to attack the American islands of Wake and Guam. The Commander-in-Chief, Vice-Admiral Inouye, was at Truk, flying his flag in the light cruiser *Kashima*. At Hahajima was the Guam "attack and cooperation force" of the *6th Cruiser Squadron*, Rear-Admiral Goto in the heavy ships *Aoba* (Flag) *Kako*, *Furutaka* and *Kinugasa*, the minelayer *Tsugaru*, and three destroyers. At Kwajalein the Wake force, under Rear-Admiral Kajioka, consisted of the light cruisers *Tatsuta* and *Tenryu*, and six destroyers with their light cruiser *Yubari*. At Jaluit were the *19th Minelayer Squadron*, *Okinoshima* and *Tenyo Maru*, and two destroyers. At Ominato, away to the north on the farthest tip of the Japanese home island of Honshu, were the units of the *Fifth Fleet*, light cruisers *Tama* and *Kiso*, and the *22nd Picket Boat Squadron*, and the *Seventh Base Force*.

The Japanese Navy had powerful land-based air forces disposed in the Southern Area. The *11th Air Fleet* at Takao, Formosa—which controlled also the naval air forces in Indo-China—consisted of about 300 aircraft, of which 150 were fighters, 120 bombers, and the remainder miscellaneous types. In Indo-China were part of the *21st*, *22nd* and *23rd Air Flotillas*. The three units—*Genzan*, *Mihoro*, and *Kanoya*—forming the *22nd*

Flotilla, were in south Indo-China based on the Saigon area, and totalled about 110 torpedo-bomber aircraft, and a number of fighter and reconnaissance planes. In addition, around 70 seaplanes were carried in seaplane tenders, and approximately 80 seaplanes were in battleships and cruisers of the Combined Fleet.

The Japanese naval forces were thus poised for simultaneous attack on objectives widely separated over the whole of the western half of the Pacific Ocean north of the equator. They were to play their part in a vast and bold conception of conquest demanding skill and efficiency in planning in all its aspects—in administration, intelligence, operations, supply, and timing. It was a conception that demanded for its success initial secrecy, and a large measure of good fortune. In the event, these factors were present in large measure, though one piece of ill fortune was suffered.

III

As stated in the preceding chapter, the final decision to resort to war was taken by the Japanese Government on the 1st December. Next day the various commanding officers were told that the day of attack was fixed as the 8th of the month, Japanese time; but as negotiations were still in progress between Japan and the United States, orders for the various offensives were qualified with the proviso that operational action would be stopped if the negotiations should reach a successful conclusion before the actual blows were struck. Such diplomatic success was not achieved.

Timing of the blows demanded that the Pearl Harbour striking force should be the first to set out for its objective, and on the day the final decision to resort to war was made it was already well on its way in the North Pacific. No hint of its existence, mission or progress, leaked out, and on the 4th December it was about 900 miles north of Midway Island, and turning south-eastward towards its flying-off position.

It was more difficult for the Japanese to conceal their preparations in the Southern Area, and some knowledge of these, coupled with the general deterioration of the political situation in the Far East, led to some deployment of American and Dutch naval forces in the Western Pacific during the last week in November. On the 24th of that month the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Asiatic Fleet, Admiral Hart, sent two divisions of destroyers south from the Philippines to Dutch Borneo—the four ships of the 57th Division to Balikpapan, and the light cruiser *Marblehead* with the destroyer *Paul Jones*⁹ and the four ships of the 58th Division, to Tarakan. A week later the Dutch Commander-in-Chief, Vice-Admiral Helfrich, disposed his forces in accordance with “Plenaps”—“Plans for the employment of the naval and air forces of the associated powers in the eastern theatre in the event of war with Japan”—as had been decided at the Singapore Con-

⁹ *Paul Jones*, US destroyer (1921), 1,190 tons, six 3-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 35 kts.

ferences earlier in the year. The cruiser *Java*, destroyers *Evertsen*¹ and *Van Nes*,² and submarines *K 11*, *K 12*, *K 13*,³ *O 16*⁴ and *K 17*,⁵ were placed under the operational control of the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, in the Singapore area; and the rest of the Dutch force was concentrated in the Java Sea.

Early in December the Dutch asked for the despatch of Australian troops to Koepang and Ambon as a "Plenaps" commitment. In a reply shortly after midnight on the 6th December, the Naval Board told Helfrich that it was proposed for the time being to send troops to Koepang only, and to transport them in *Zealandia* escorted by *Westralia* (both ships being then in Darwin) and requesting concurrence. Helfrich agreed, and late in the afternoon of the 7th, instructions were issued for the embarkation of the Koepang force ("Sparrow") at Darwin.

Meanwhile intelligence of Japanese ship concentrations reached Melbourne. On the 4th December, the day the Japanese Pearl Harbour force reached its south-eastward turning point, Long, the Director of Naval Intelligence, signalled to the Captain on the Intelligence Staff (C.O.I.S.) Singapore: "Information received 1800 GMT 3rd December [4 a.m. 4th December Melbourne time] from reliable Dutch source Menado that eight transports twenty warships left Palau proceeding towards N.E.I."⁶ Singapore replied soon after noon, Melbourne time, on the 5th: "No information here." Within little more than 24 hours, however, at 5.45 p.m. on the 6th, Melbourne time, Singapore informed Melbourne of the sighting by Malayan air reconnaissance four hours earlier of the Japanese convoys of transports and warships south-east of Indo-China.

The Hainan Island convoy of nineteen transports (carrying approximately 26,640 troops), escorted by *Sendai* and the *3rd Destroyer Squadron*, sailed from Samah at 5 a.m.⁷ on the 4th December under the close cover of Rear-Admiral Kurita's *7th Cruiser Squadron*, *Kumano*, *Mikuma*, *Suzuya* and *Mogami*. Its orders were to proceed southwards, skirting the Indo-Chinese coast and rounding Point Camo at an offing of 100 to 150 miles, to a position (point "G") in the Gulf of Siam approximately 160 miles W.N.W. of Point Camo. Here it would rendezvous with a convoy of seven transports escorted by one light cruiser (*Kashii*) which left Saigon on the 5th December. If sighted in the Gulf of Siam before reaching

¹ *Evertsen*, Dutch destroyer (1927), 1,310 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; beached in Sunda Strait, 28 Feb 1942.

² *Van Nes*, Dutch destroyer (1930), 1,316 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk off Banka I, 17 Feb 1942.

³ *K 11*, *K 12* and *K 13*, Dutch submarines (1925), 611 tons, one 3.5-in gun, two 21-in and four 17.7-in torp tubes, 15 kts; *K 13* damaged at Singapore end Dec 1941 and scuttled at Surabaya, 2 Mar 1942.

⁴ *O 16*, Dutch submarine (1936), 896 tons, one 3.5-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 18 kts; mined off east coast of Malaya, 13 Dec 1941.

⁵ *K 17*, Dutch submarine (1932), 782 tons, one 3.5-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17 kts; sunk near Singora, 21 Dec 1941.

⁶ Actually this force did not leave Palau until 6-8 December, and then for the Philippines. But its presence at Palau was correct, and its constitution was approximately as reported.

⁷ This is from Japanese source material in which Tokyo times were presumably kept; but in discussing these convoy movements here, Singapore time (1 hour 30 mins behind Tokyo time) is used.

point "G" the course north of west would give the impression that the destination was Bangkok. From point "G", the convoys would disperse to their several destinations, sixteen ships of the main convoy to the Singora-Patani area in Thailand and the remaining three to Kota Bharu in Malaya; and the seven ships of the Saigon convoy to the Kra Isthmus.

The first sighting of the convoy on the morning of the 6th December gave no indication of its precise destination, but, as stated earlier, Air Chief Marshal Brooke-Popham decided that it would probably turn north-west in the Gulf of Siam to demonstrate against and bring pressure to bear on Thailand. This influenced him in not ordering MATADOR, but to seek further intelligence of the convoys' movements. Air reconnaissance during the night of the 6th-7th December failed, however, to re-establish contact with the Japanese force owing to unfavourable weather.

The convoy (in which the aircraft sighting on the 6th was suspected) was therefore able to reach point "G" at 9 a.m. on the 7th, and the main group altered course to the south without that fact being known at Singapore. The weather, which was cloudy and at times rainy, assisted in its concealment, and it steamed southwards at some 16 knots. Meanwhile more air searches from Malaya were organised, and early on the 7th a Catalina flying-boat took off on this mission. It presumably sighted the convoy, now on its southern course, during the afternoon; but if so it failed to report its discovery before, at 2.30 p.m., it was shot down by the Japanese—their first act of war in the conflict of 1939-45.

Other air searches throughout the day failed to find the convoy, which continued its southern course and dispersed its ships to their various destinations unopposed. The intention had been that simultaneous landings should be made at Singora, Patani, and Kota Bharu. In this, the navy's contention that a landing at Kota Bharu should be deferred⁸ until success at Singora and Patani was assured, was overruled by the army. Anchorages were selected one-and-a-half to two miles off shore at each point, and time of arrival was fixed at 0.30 a.m. on the 8th December. The convoy, however, arrived ahead of time. The nine ships of the Singora detachment arrived there at 10.10 p.m. on the 7th; the five Patani transports reached their destination a little later; and at 10.30 p.m. the Kota Bharu ships—*Sakura Maru* (7,170 tons), *Awagisan Maru* (9,794 tons), and *Ayato Maru* (9,788 tons)—dropped anchor at "the expected anchorage bed". At Singora, where the town was brilliantly lighted and surprise complete, landing was delayed by the sea, the height of waves being about six feet. In the first landing attempt half of the landing craft sank or went aground, and landing was not effected until 2.40 a.m. on the 8th. Conditions at Patani (though there was no opposition) also delayed landing, and it was 3 a.m. on the 8th before the first troops got on shore. At Kota Bharu, however, despite opposition, and sea conditions with high waves which damaged and capsized boats, the first landing was effected at 12.45 a.m. Meanwhile aircraft of the R.A.A.F. made persistent low-level

⁸ The navy believed that, in addition to strong ground defences at Kota Bharu, there were some 40 or 50 torpedo aircraft there also.

bombing and machine-gun attacks on the ships, and at 2.30 a.m. *Awagisan* sank, after sustaining ten direct bomb hits and being on fire. Both other transports were damaged. Thus Malaya was the first territory—British, Dutch, or American—to suffer assault; and its defenders were the first to sink a Japanese ship in the Pacific war. At Singora the Thai army and police force offered token resistance, but by early afternoon of the 8th this ended, and Thailand was in Japanese hands.

While the first of the invaders' landing craft were making for the shore at Kota Bharu, Nagumo's carriers of the Pearl Harbour striking force, pitching in a moderate head sea some 7,000 miles to the eastward and northward, were launching their aircraft north of Hawaii for the assault with bombs and torpedoes on ships in Pearl Harbour, and on the adjacent airfields. In Hawaii (whose time lags ten hours behind that of Greenwich, which in turn is seven-and-a-half hours behind Malaya's) it was 6.30 in the morning of Sunday, 7th December, with the sun rising to usher in a bright and—at the moment—peaceful sabbath.

Ninety-four ships of the Pacific Fleet were in harbour, 70 of them combat vessels including the eight battleships, eight cruisers, 29 destroyers, five submarines, and a number of minelayers, minesweepers, auxiliaries and other craft. The two carriers, fortunately for the Americans and their soon-to-be allies in the Pacific, were at sea (it was the only ill fortune suffered by the Japanese in those early days of the war, but its effects were far reaching), as were ten heavy and three light cruisers, 15 destroyers and seven submarines.

Around 7.30 a.m., local time, the first of the Japanese aircraft were nearing Pearl Harbour. They were probably the dive bombers, which circled awaiting the arrival of the slower torpedo aircraft. At 7.55 a.m. the first bomb fell on the naval base from which, three minutes later, a broadcast awoke America to a state of war: "Air raid Pearl Harbour—this is no drill." Within the next few hours further Japanese air attacks were in progress—on Guam, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Wake Island. The operations in Japan's far-flung plan were under way.

IV

Admiral Phillips, Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Fleet, reached Singapore from his conference with Admiral Hart in Manila, on the evening of the 7th December. No further sighting of the main Japanese convoy (the first report of which had hastened his return from Manila) had been made, and its destination and mission were still not clear to the Singapore authorities. It was calculated, however, that if Singora were its destination, it could reach it about midnight that night. At a conference at the naval base at about 10.30 p.m. on the 7th, attended by Phillips and Air Chief Marshal Brooke-Popham, the earlier decision not to order *MATADOR* was reaffirmed. They considered that even if it met no obstacle or opposition on the way into Thailand, only a small British force, lacking reserves, could reach Singora, and that not earlier than 2 a.m. on the 8th. Before 1 a.m. on that date, however, any doubts as to Japanese

intentions were resolved, because news reached Singapore of the Japanese landing at Kota Bharu.⁹ Two or three hours later Singapore was bombed by eighteen Japanese aircraft.¹ During the day strategic aerodromes throughout Malaya were attacked by Japanese bombers whose "performance and the accuracy of their high-level bombing had come as an unpleasant surprise".²

News reaching Singapore from northern Malaya showed that the principal enemy landings were at Singora; and after discussion with Brooke-Popham in the morning, and with his own staff and senior officers in the early afternoon, Admiral Phillips announced his intention of taking the fleet to sea to attack the Japanese transports.³ From the information available to him, it appeared to Phillips that he might have to contend with a Japanese surface force of one battleship (believed to be *Kongo*), seven cruisers, and twenty destroyers. There was also the danger of air attack from bases in Indo-China; and of torpedo attack by submarines. This was formidable opposition; but a successful attack on the Japanese landing forces at this stage could well be decisive in the fate of Malaya. That the risk was justified was concurred in by all the officers at the naval conference.

By direct sea route Singora lies some 450 miles to the N.N.W. of Singapore. Admiral Phillips, however, proposed to steer courses adding some 250 miles to that distance. By sailing that night (the 8th), making well to the eastward and keeping the Anambas Islands (200 miles or so N.E. of Singapore) to port, he would reduce the risk of submarine attack or possible damage by mines; and would also increase the possibility of escaping detection on his passage northwards during daylight on the 9th December, especially if anticipated overcast weather with poor visibility prevailed. His approach to the coast at Singora would be under cover of darkness on the night of the 9th-10th, and a surprise arrival there at dawn on the 10th by no means impossible. He anticipated that, if so far successful, he would certainly have to deal with long-range bomber attacks during retirement. He therefore requested three measures of air support from Air Vice-Marshal Pulford,⁴ Air Officer Commanding, Malaya: air reconnaissance 100 miles ahead of the fleet throughout daylight on the 9th; air reconnaissance along the coast from Kota Bharu to beyond Singora from dawn on the 10th; and fighter cover over the fleet off Singora from daylight on the 10th. In reply he was told that reconnaissance

⁹ C-in-C China's report to the Admiralty that the Japanese were landing at Kota Bharu was timed 5.46 p.m. GMT, 7 Dec (1.16 a.m. 8 Dec Singapore time).

¹ Both *Vampire* and *Manoora*, in Singapore at the time, recorded the air raid as at 3 a.m. Other reports place the time as between 4 a.m. and 4.30 a.m.

² Lt-Gen A. E. Percival, GOC Malaya, *Despatch on Operations of Malaya Command from 8th December 1941 to 15th February 1942*.

³ The flag of Vice-Adm Sir Geoffrey Layton, as Commander-in-Chief, China Station, was hauled down at sunset on the 8th, and the appointment of C-in-C, China, lapsed. Phillips did not officially take over the command until 8 a.m. local time on 10 December.

⁴ AVM C. W. H. Pulford, CB, OBE, AFC. (HMS *Ark Royal*, Gallipoli, 1915; comd 1 Sqn 1917-18, 201 Sqn 1918.) Dir of Volunteer Reserve expansion 1938-41; AOC 20 Gp 1940-41, Far East, 1941-42. Regular airman; of London; b. Agra, India, 26 Jan 1892. Died in Juju Islands, Mar 1942, while evading capture.

on the 9th would be provided, but that there was doubt as to the ability to supply it on the 10th, and greater doubt that fighter cover could be made available off Singora. It was with this knowledge that he took the fleet—*Prince of Wales*, *Repulse*, and destroyers *Tenedos*, *Electra*, *Express* and *Vampire*—to sea soon after 5 p.m. on the 8th.

By earlier arrangement, Phillips' Chief of Staff, Rear-Admiral Palliser,⁵ did not sail with the fleet, but remained in Singapore in charge of the Commander-in-Chief's Office. Before sailing, Phillips sent, by hand, a letter to Pulford, stressing the importance he attached to fighter cover off Singora, and asking him to let him know as soon as possible what he could do for certain. As the ships passed Changi signal station at the entrance to the fleet anchorage, a signal in reply told him: "Regret fighter protection impossible." He shrugged his shoulders and said: "Well, we must get on without it."⁶

Throughout the night of the 8th the fleet, steaming at 17½ knots, steered north-easterly and rounded the Anambas Islands at daybreak on the 9th. During the forenoon, over a grey sea and under low overcast with frequent rainstorms, it proceeded N.N.W.½W., altering to north soon after 1 p.m. and continuing at 17½ knots through similar weather. Crews were at modified action stations. During the day Phillips signalled to his force that little was known of enemy naval forces in the vicinity.

It is believed that *Kongo* is the only capital ship likely to be met. Three *Atago* type, one *Kako* type and two *Jintsu* type cruisers have been reported. A number of destroyers possibly of fleet type are likely to be met. My object is to surprise and sink transports and enemy warships before air attack can develop. Objective chosen will depend on air reconnaissance. Intend to arrive objective after sunrise tomorrow 10th. If an opportunity to bring *Kongo* to action occurs this is to take precedence over all other action.

During the afternoon the presence and northward course of the fleet became known to the Japanese. At 2 p.m. it was sighted by one of the submarines which had been disposed to "warn towards Singapore". This boat reported the fleet as then in position approximately 7 degrees north, 105 degrees east, steering north. Either this position was wrongly transmitted or the submarine's navigation was at fault, for at that time the fleet was some 140 miles S.S.E. of this point. There was some delay in the delivery of this sighting report to the Japanese 22nd Air Flotilla at Saigon, which did not receive it until 4 p.m. Aircraft were at that time loading bombs for a raid on Singapore. They were re-armed with torpedoes as quickly as possible, and at 6 p.m., when it was getting dark, a striking force took the air to try to find and attack the fleet. *Kongo* and *Haruna*, and two heavy cruisers, of Vice-Admiral Kondo's covering force, rendezvoused with Kurita's 7th Cruiser Squadron at 2.30 a.m. on the 10th fifty miles south of Pulau Condore, and also tried to intercept. Owing to unfavourable weather and the error in position, the fleet was not found by

⁵ Admiral Sir Arthur Palliser, KCB, DSC; RN. Comd HMS's *Excellent* 1938-40, *Malaya* 1940-41; C of S to C-in-C Eastern Fleet 1941-42; comd 1 Cruiser Sqn 1943-44; Chief of Supplies and Transport, Admiralty, 1944-46; C-in-C East Indies Sqn 1946-48. B. 1891. Died 22 Feb 1956.

⁶ Russell Grenfell, *Main Fleet to Singapore* (1951), p. 114.

either force, and the Japanese aircraft arrived back at Saigon about midnight.

Meanwhile the fleet, at about 7 p.m., reached a position approximately 120 miles S.S.E. of Point Camo and 300 miles to the eastward of Singora, and Phillips altered course for the Thailand port and increased speed to 26 knots, informing the force that he intended to attack enemy surface vessels off Singora just after daylight with the two big ships only.⁷ Destroyers would be detached to a rendezvous off the Anambas Islands at 10 p.m. Two hours before the change of course, *Vampire* had reported sighting one possible enemy aircraft. This was unconfirmed, but at 6.45 p.m. the sky cleared and the fleet was shadowed by at least three aircraft.

At about this time Palliser, in Singapore, sent Phillips a signal to say that air reconnaissance reported one Japanese battleship, one heavy cruiser, eleven destroyers, and a number of transports close inshore off Kota Bharu. Phillips had decided that, in the absence of fighter cover the following morning, surprise was essential. The shadowing of the fleet indicated that surprise was lost and, after a discussion with his staff, he decided to abandon the operation. Speed was reduced to 20 knots; *Tenedos* was detached to return to Singapore independently, with instructions to send a signal to Singapore at 8 a.m. the following morning (when she would be well away from the fleet) as from Phillips, saying that the force would be off the Anambas Islands on its return passage not earlier than 6 a.m. on the 11th. At 8.40 p.m. course was altered to S.S.E. and the remaining destroyers were told to stay with the fleet. Soon after this a second signal from Palliser told Phillips that the Kota Bharu aerodrome was in enemy hands; that all northern Malayan aerodromes were becoming untenable due to bombing; that Brooke-Popham "hints he is considering concentrating all air efforts on the defence of the Singapore area"; and that "enemy bombers on South Indo-China aerodromes are in force and undisturbed. They could attack you in five hours after sighting and much depends on whether you have been seen today. Two carriers may be in Saigon area."

For the remainder of the night of the 9th the fleet retired S.S.E. at 20 knots towards the Anambas Islands. Shortly before midnight Phillips received a signal from Palliser: "Enemy reported landing Kuantan, latitude 3°50'N.",⁸ and at a quarter to one in the morning of the 10th he altered course towards, increased speed to 25 knots, and told the fleet that he was going in to attack this new landing force.

Some two hours later, as the fleet was about crossing the 105th meridian on its way to the coast, it was sighted, unsuccessfully attacked with five torpedoes, and then reported by a second Japanese submarine—I 58.⁹ The report was received by the 22nd Air Flotilla at Saigon at 3.15 a.m., and ten aircraft were dispatched on a sector search for the ships. An

⁷ Phillips was concerned at the fuel position in the destroyers, anticipating a prolonged period of high speed steaming during the operation.

⁸ This was a false alarm.

⁹ I 58, Japanese submarine (1929), 1,635 tons, one 4.7-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 19 kts.

hour after them a striking force of 88 aircraft (27 bombers and 61 torpedo bombers) took off, and after concentrating sped south along the 105th meridian towards "the best estimated position of the enemy ships". Of this, Admiral Phillips was unaware.

As the fleet approached the coast at dawn on the 10th a small tug with four barges was sighted and passed. Between 6.30 and 7 a.m. an enemy reconnaissance aircraft appeared.¹ At 8 a.m. the fleet reached the expected invasion force position, but sighted nothing unusual. The two big ships catapulted reconnaissance aircraft, and *Express*, sent inshore to make a close investigation, returned to report everything quiet. At 9.30 a.m. course was altered to E. by N., and the fleet proceeded at 20 knots to investigate the tug and barges sighted earlier. About 10 a.m. came a report from *Tenedos*, about 140 miles to the southward, that she was being bombed.

Meanwhile the ten original Japanese search aircraft from Saigon had reached as far south as Singapore without sighting anything, and had turned north again. It was on this return leg that they sighted the fleet² and broadcast an alarm to Saigon and to the nearby striking force. Shortly after 10 a.m., aircraft were detected by the fleet and Phillips ordered 1st degree of anti-aircraft readiness.

The enemy striking force was first sighted at 11 a.m., the initial attack being by nine bombers which *Vampire* watched come in from ahead "at an estimated height of 15,000 feet" in close formation which they held for the whole attack "with complete disregard for anti-aircraft fire". All ships opened fire except the Australian destroyer, of which the aircraft did not come within range. The attack was concentrated on *Repulse*, who suffered one direct hit and straddling near misses, but sustained no major damage. There followed five more main attacks, concentrated on the two big ships. The first of these, delivered about twenty minutes after the initial bombing attack, was by torpedo aircraft. *Repulse* successfully evaded the torpedoes (Captain Tennant³ estimated that she combed as many as twelve tracks), but *Prince of Wales* was hit on the port side right aft. Thereafter she was never under complete control. Both port propeller shafts were stopped, reducing her speed considerably; the steering gear was affected; some machinery rooms were flooded; and she took a list to port, with increased trim aft so that the port side of her quarter-deck was soon awash.

The third attack was by high-level bombers, and was survived by both ships with apparently no direct hits. At this time Captain Tennant, unaware if the Commander-in-Chief had reported the attack (he had not

¹ Account by Capt W. G. Tennant of *Repulse*. Japanese accounts make no mention of this aircraft reporting the sighting.

² Times vary regarding this sighting. A Japanese account says "at 1100 the contact was broadcast to the striking group and headquarters". Capt Tennant said the order to assume 1st degree anti-aircraft readiness was signalled by the flagship "at about 10.15". *Vampire* recorded "at 10.30". British accounts agree that the first attack developed at or shortly after 11 a.m.

³ Admiral Sir William Tennant, KCB, CBE, MVO; RN, Comd HMS *Repulse* 1940-42; FO Levant and Eastern Mediterranean 1944-46; C-in-C America and West Indies 1946-49. B. 2 Jan 1890.

done so, though the reason is not known⁴) made the emergency report "Enemy aircraft bombing" to Singapore, and closed *Prince of Wales* to see if he could help in any way. Shortly after this the fourth attack developed, by torpedo bombers, and *Repulse* was hit amidships but continued to manoeuvre and steam at about 25 knots. Her end, however, came quickly. At about 12.20 "torpedo bomber aircraft seemed to appear from several directions" and attacked both big ships. In quick succession *Repulse* was hit aft and put out of control with a jammed rudder, though steaming at over 20 knots; and then struck by at least three torpedoes, two on the port side, and one on the starboard. She listed heavily to port, and at 12.33 rolled over and sank. Meanwhile *Prince of Wales*, some five miles distant, was also hit by three torpedoes, one at the stern, one aft, and one amidships on the starboard side. She righted from her port list, but settled appreciably.

When *Repulse* capsized, Phillips ordered *Vampire* and *Electra* to pick up survivors. Moran, *Vampire's* commanding officer, recorded that:

As *Vampire* was approaching the survivors a high-level bombing formation was observed coming over *Prince of Wales* towards us. It appeared from their angle of sight that they intended attacking *Electra* and *Vampire*. Consequently I went astern to avoid giving them a sitting shot at two destroyers close together. Just as I did this I saw them drop and went in again. The pattern dropped round *Prince of Wales* and it is estimated two hits at least were scored on her.

Prince of Wales fought back with her remaining anti-aircraft batteries. According to her senior surviving officer she was straddled by this salvo of bombs and sustained one hit on the catapult deck while "near misses may have caused further damage". She sank shortly afterwards, "at 1.15 p.m., in position 3°38'N, 104°28½'E. The bombers made off and made no attempt to attack us."⁵

The first and only indication to those at Singapore that the fleet was under air attack was Captain Tennant's emergency signal, received at 12.4 p.m. A fighter squadron of six Brewster Buffaloes (American-built aircraft of comparatively slow speed and poor manoeuvrability) took off at 12.15 and reached the scene of attack just as *Prince of Wales* was sinking, and when all enemy aircraft had departed.

Vampire rescued nine officers (including Captain Tennant), 213 ratings, and one war correspondent from *Repulse*, and two ratings from *Prince of Wales*. Four of those picked up died on board. "The predominant casualties amongst survivors in H.M.A.S. *Vampire*," wrote that ship's medical officer, Surgeon-Lieutenant John Russell,⁶ "fell into two categories: immersion and shock; extensive burns. I should like to draw attention to the lack of resuscitation equipment aboard destroyers. This fortunately

⁴ The only signal addressed to Singapore by Admiral Phillips was one which he directed *Tenedos* to send at 8 a.m. on the 10th December when she was well clear of the fleet. It stated that 6 a.m. on the 11th was the earliest time the force was likely to be off the Anambas Islands on its return passage, and asked that all available destroyers might be sent to meet it.

⁵ *Vampire's* report.

⁶ Surg-Lt J. Russell, RANR. HMAS's *Australia* 1941, *Vampire* 1941-42. Medical practitioner; of Sydney and Brisbane; b. Warwick, Qld, 15 Jun 1915.

was offset by a remarkable and practical knowledge of resuscitation possessed by several members of the ship's company, who are well versed in methods of surf life saving."

In all, 796 officers and men from *Repulse* were picked up by *Vampire* and *Electra*. Twenty-seven officers and 486 ratings lost their lives. Most of the flagship's survivors were rescued by *Express*, who went alongside the stricken ship and remained there until the last possible moment. Of the 1,612 officers and men comprising the complement of the *Prince of Wales*, 90 officers and 1,195 men were saved. Admiral Phillips, and his Flag Captain, Captain Leach,⁷ went down with the ship. At 11.25 p.m. on the 10th, little more than forty-eight hours after the fleet had sailed from Singapore, *Vampire* secured alongside *Express* at the naval base and disembarked her quota of survivors.

Admiral Phillips' venture was thus a failure, and one suffered at heavy cost. But with the information at his disposal it seemed to hold possibilities of success whose result could have been far-reaching; or of failure in its immediate objective but without detriment to the fleet. The stakes were high, the odds heavy. Phillips accepted those odds, but it seems that he did not foresee the weight of the air attack he might meet; nor was he, apparently, alone in this. The general tendency in British intelligence at the time was to underrate Japanese capabilities in the air. Probably he discounted the likelihood of attack by shore-based torpedo bombers. He knew that the Japanese had strong air forces in Indo-China around Saigon, but the distance to either Singora or Kuantan was some 400 miles, and at that date experience suggested this was beyond the range of torpedo bombers. Enough is known now of the Japanese dispositions to realise that even had Phillips reached Singora unlocated according to plan, he would have been disappointed in his object, for he would have found the anchorage empty of transports. There remained the possibility that he might then have encountered Kondo's superior surface force, as well as the air striking force which subsequently attacked him.

After the Japanese attacks on the ships, naval opinion in Singapore apparently was that the torpedo bombers had been carrier-borne. Admiral Royle, who was in Singapore at the time and was himself a Fleet Air Arm specialist of wide experience, told the Advisory War Council on his return to Australia a few days later, that

when Admiral Phillips decided to undertake the operation he had no knowledge that Japanese aircraft carriers were present. A mass torpedo attack is the most dangerous form of attack against a fleet. This was well known in the Royal Navy and had Admiral Phillips been aware of the presence of Japanese aircraft carriers he would not have proceeded with the operation. Air reconnaissance, however, had failed to locate the carrier. Japanese shore-based aircraft had to operate from a base 300 [sic] miles away and the risk that Admiral Phillips took was slightly less than that which was taken by the fleet in the Mediterranean.

⁷ Capt J. C. Leach, DSO, MVO; RN. (HMS *Erin* 1914-18.) Dir of Naval Ordnance, Admiralty, 1941; comd HMS *Prince of Wales* and CSO to C-in-C Eastern Fleet 1941. B. 1 Sep 1894. Lost in sinking of *Prince of Wales*, 10 Dec 1941.

Air reconnaissance could not locate the carrier because there was no carrier nearer than *Ryujo*, some 2,000 miles away, to the east of the Philippines with the Legaspi invasion force. Actually, the naval medium bombers based on Saigon had an operational radius of about 700 miles.

It will never be known why Admiral Phillips did not signal for fighter support off Kuantan as soon as he knew that air attack was imminent on the morning of the 10th. It may be that he thought that any such request could not be met in any circumstances. He had been told that fighter cover could not be provided off Singora, and had since learned from Palliser that "all northern aerodromes are becoming untenable due to enemy air action. C-in-C., Far East, hints he is considering concentrating all air efforts on defence of Singapore." It could have thus appeared to him that the situation on land was far worse than it actually was at the time.

Unfortunately, if Phillips were unaware of the true position on land, the authorities at Singapore were equally in the dark about his position at sea. Only one signal from him reached them—that despatched from *Tenedos* which, timed by the admiral 2.55 p.m. on the 9th, was transmitted by the destroyer, on his instructions, at 8 a.m. on the 10th. From it, it was inferred in Singapore during the forenoon of the 10th, that Phillips could not have proceeded as far north as Singora.⁸ Apparently it was not also inferred that he might have acted on Palliser's signal of the evening of the 9th, and hastened to Kuantan to investigate the situation there; which, indeed, might have been considered possible, if not probable, when that signal was sent. Had it been so considered, one would imagine that the question would have arisen of sending fighters to Kuantan airfield to provide cover if necessary.

Sea communications were the vital factor. The fleet, unbalanced though it was, was the one weapon with which so damaging a blow could at that time have been dealt the Japanese as to have affected their plans and, possibly, the fate of Malaya. As such it should have been given the highest priority in air defence, to the exclusion of all other considerations. As it was, in a period of confusion made worse confounded by mutual lack of knowledge as to the respective situations on land and sea, Admiral Phillips did the best he could with the inadequate means at his disposal.

According to Japanese accounts, 18 bombers and 24 torpedo aircraft attacked *Prince of Wales*, nine bombers and 32 torpedo aircraft attacked *Repulse*; a total of 56 torpedoes of which apparently nine found their mark, though the Japanese estimated that 12 hit *Repulse* and 10 the *Prince of Wales*. Four Japanese aircraft were lost.

⁸ There appear to have been no grounds in the signal for such an inference. From Admiral Phillips' intended position off Singora at 6 a.m. on the 10th, to the point off the Anambas, was 380 miles: i.e., he could have spent 5½ hours off Singora if he withdrew at 20 knots and 8½ hours if he withdrew at 25 knots, and reached the Anambas at 6.30 a.m. on the 11th. Moreover the signal expressly stated that he would probably approach the Anambas on a course which led directly from Singora. Actually the plan to attack Singora was not dropped till some two or three hours after the signal was written out.

CHAPTER 14

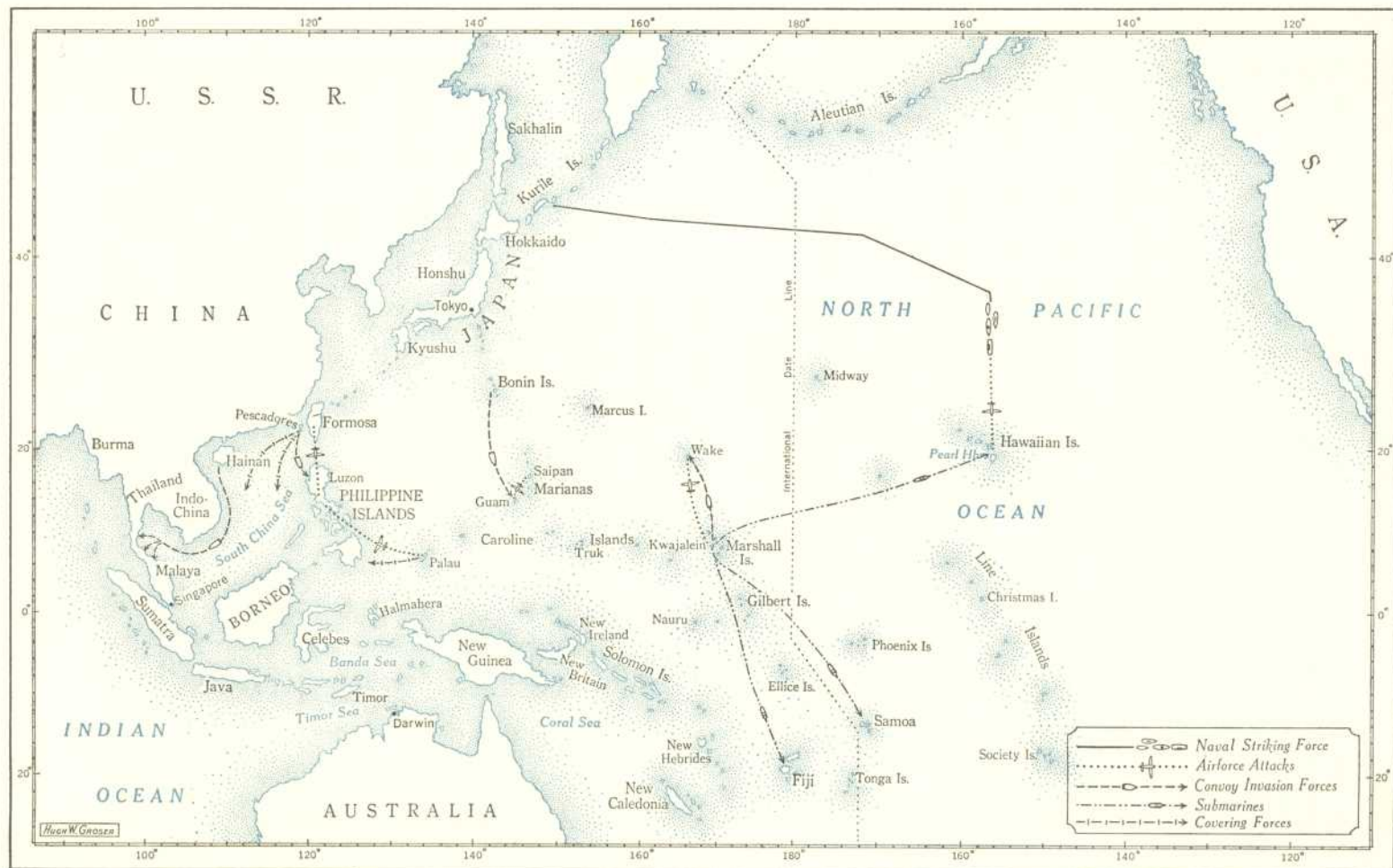
SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC AREA

WHEN, "In Sixteen Hundred and Forty-One", the folks of Mexico's Acapulco Bay waited in vain for the return from the Philippines of Bret Harte's legendary "Lost Galleon", while that ship searched fruitlessly in mid-Pacific for the day she had missed on the 180th meridian, they were puzzled by a problem which plagued the historian recording events in that ocean in Nineteen Hundred and Forty-One. Pearl Harbour lies 1,300 miles east of the 180th meridian. Wake Island, an isolated atoll over which the American flag waved in December 1941, lies some 800 miles west of the meridian. Yet, though only some 2,100 miles distant from one another they are, in the local time each keeps, separated by 22 hours. On the line (running approximately E. by N.-W. by S. between Kota Bharu and Pearl Harbour for a distance of some 6,000 miles) along which the Japanese struck on the 7th-8th December 1941, it would seem, if local times only are considered, that initial blows fell over a period of 28 hours; from the air attack on Pearl Harbour at 7.55 a.m. on the 7th December to that on Wake Island at noon on the 8th. Actually, the Japanese struck initially at six points (including Hong Kong, well to the north of the line mentioned above) within a space of seven hours, in the chronological order Malaya, Pearl Harbour, the Philippines, Guam, Hong Kong, Wake Island. Reduced to the common denominator of Eastern Australian Time, here used while describing events against the Melbourne background, the initial Japanese attacks were:

Kota Bharu	.	.	.	3.5	a.m., 8th December
Pearl Harbour	.	.	.	4.25	a.m., 8th December
Philippines	.	.	.	8	a.m., 8th December
Guam	.	.	.	8.27	a.m., 8th December
Hong Kong	.	.	.	10	a.m., 8th December
Wake Island	.	.	.	10	a.m., 8th December

With the exception of that on Kota Bharu, all of these were air attacks.

The first news of the Japanese attacks—a signal from the Commander-in-Chief, China, stating that the enemy were attempting to land at Kota Bharu—reached Navy Office, Melbourne, soon after 4.30 a.m. on the 8th December, a Monday. Soon after 6 a.m. a signal from the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, addressed to the Australian and New Zealand Naval Boards, and to the Dutch Naval Commander-in-Chief in the Netherlands East Indies, Vice-Admiral Helfrich, requested implementation of that section of "Plenaps" calling for air and naval reinforcements of Singapore to meet an attack on Malaya. In view of the Commonwealth Government's stipulation on the 26th November regarding the minimum it could accept as protection on the Australia Station before agreeing to the transfer of strategic control of Australian ships, and of its instructions



The Japanese Attacks between 3.5 a.m. and 10 a.m., 8th December 1941

to Admiral Royle to enter into no commitments at Singapore without prior submission to the Government, no action was called for by the Australian Navy. The New Zealand Government, however, ordered H.M.N.Z.S. *Achilles*, then patrolling north of New Zealand, to fuel at Suva and proceed swiftly via Port Moresby to join the Eastern Fleet at Singapore.¹ At 7.43 a.m. the Admiralty war signal, "Commence hostilities against Japan at once" reached Navy Office, and was immediately passed to H.M.A. Ships² and to the four Area Combined Headquarters. During the forenoon Ocean Island reported that a Japanese aircraft dropped bombs on the island at 11 a.m.

Meanwhile short wave broadcast reports of Japanese attacks reached Melbourne, and these continued to arrive throughout the day, and to give some indications of the scope of the enemy's plan. They included reports that an air attack on Pearl Harbour began at 4 a.m.; that an announcement from Tokyo declared that Japan had entered a state of war with Britain and the United States in the Western Pacific; and that Shanghai had been attacked by Japanese aircraft and marines. A broadcast from Wake Island reported the aerodrome there bombed out by twenty Japanese aircraft and appealed for immediate assistance; and an intercepted message from some unknown station stated that Guam had been bombed. Singapore also reported an air attack; and a report was received that Bangkok had been bombed by aircraft and bombarded from the sea. From Nauru came information that a Japanese aircraft had flown over the island without attacking.³

These reports were considered by the War Cabinet at a meeting held in Melbourne that day, and it was agreed that the situation should be accepted as involving a state of war with Japan.⁴ In the absence at the conference in Singapore of Admiral Royle, the Acting Chief of the Naval Staff, Commodore Durnford, told the meeting what naval measures had been instituted. The departure of merchant ships for overseas was suspended; merchant vessels in northern waters were instructed to fall back on Rabaul and Port Moresby; a convoy consisting of the coastal liner *Katoomba* carrying troops for Rabaul and escorted by *Adelaide*, was held at Port Moresby; instructions were issued for the extinction of coastal navigation lights excepting those at Rabaul and Port Moresby, which were controlled by the Naval Officers-in-charge; and coastwatchers were warned

¹ *Achilles* reached Port Moresby at 4.30 p.m. on 11 Dec, the day after the loss of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*. She was ordered back to the New Zealand Station, and reached Auckland on the 16th.

² HMAS *Adelaide* was in Port Moresby on the morning of 8 Dec, and one of her officers later recalled: "In the wardroom, the officers had just finished their breakfast when the signal officer pinned a pink signal on the notice board, from the Naval Board, which read: 'Commence hostilities with Japan.' One by one the officers read it and walked quietly away. There was nothing to be said. They all realised the implications of such a decision—prolonging of the war and much bloodshed—yet of what avail were mere words. An impetuous sub. said, 'Now the fun starts', and a lieutenant who had traded to Japan for many years in the Merchant Navy remarked 'I've been waiting for this day for a long time'; but otherwise a pregnant silence prevailed." Lt W. N. Swan, RANR(S), "Another Job Done", *HMAS* (1942), p. 198.

³ Combined Operational Intelligence Centre, "Situation Report No. 1". Information received up to 4 p.m., 8 Dec.

⁴ The formal decision to declare war on Japan was made on 9 Dec. (Advisory War Council Minute 586.)

to extra vigilance. Durnford told the War Cabinet that no immediate decisions as to naval measures were required of it. He outlined the dispositions of the larger units of the R.A.N.: *Adelaide* at Moresby, *Westralia* at Darwin; *Kanimbla* and *Manoora* at Singapore; *Australia* on passage from Simonstown to Fremantle; *Canberra* and *Perth* in the Tasman Sea area; *Hobart* in the Mediterranean; and *Yarra* in the Persian Gulf.⁵ Discussing the possibility of Japanese attack on Australia, Durnford told the War Cabinet that an air attack from an enemy aircraft carrier was unlikely in the early stages because of the cruiser escort that the carrier would need. Attacks on trade by armed merchant cruisers could be expected; but though Australian escort facilities were limited he considered they were adequate to deal with armed merchant cruiser or limited cruiser attack. He thought an attack on Rabaul was possible.

Regarding the dispatch of A.I.F. troops to Koepang, the Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, told the War Cabinet that he had approved of this the previous day. Durnford told the meeting that, there being no cruiser at Darwin, *Westralia* had been ordered to escort *Zealandia* to Koepang. There was no immediate enemy threat in the area, and air cover would be available over most of the route. The War Cabinet confirmed both actions. ("Sparrow" Force sailed from Darwin in the early morning of the 10th December with a total of 1,402 troops, 957 in *Zealandia* and 445 in *Westralia*. Koepang was reached, without incident, on the morning of the 12th. The two ships arrived back in Darwin four days later.)

One other matter called for discussion by the War Cabinet in view of the urgency of the military situation—that of shipping delays resulting from holdups and industrial disputes. The question had arisen earlier at a meeting of the War Cabinet on the 4th December, when Durnford pointed out that in the event of war it would be necessary to convoy shipping, which would necessitate regularity in sailings. The delays that frequently occurred were causing the naval authorities concern,⁶ and he asked if steps could be taken to obviate them. The Prime Minister undertook himself to see into the matter. At the War Cabinet meeting on the 8th December the Chiefs of Staff referred to delays in unloading war materials at Darwin, and expressed their view that urgent action should be taken to prevent delays which seriously prejudiced Darwin's defence measures. The War Cabinet decided that the Minister for Labour and National Service, Mr Ward, accompanied by the Conciliation Commissioner, Mr Blakeley, should be asked to go to Darwin immediately, Ward

⁵ The Naval Board was sometimes behindhand in its knowledge of the movements of HMA Ships on overseas stations. *Yarra* left the Persian Gulf in November, and by the middle of that month had joined the Mediterranean station. She was in the Mediterranean on 8 Dec 1941.

⁶ Holdups in the shipping industry were increasing. In some instances complaints by the seamen regarding living conditions in individual ships were justified, but many holdups were completely irresponsible and frivolous. A large number resulted from men going ashore for drink immediately prior to sailing time, their absence causing the remainder to refuse to sail "shorthanded". Often the absentees returned drunk, and refused to board their ship. The action of even one or two men in this way could delay the sailing of a ship. In December 1941, after the Japanese entered the war, fourteen ships were held up simultaneously in Australian ports because they could not get crews. Excuses given were that the men wished to spend Christmas at home, or to have the weekend in port. (*The Telegraph*, Brisbane, 13 Dec 1941.) Shipping holdups, arising both from seamen's and waterside workers' disputes continued to be a source of worry to the Government and the Naval Board throughout the war.

being fully authorised to take all necessary steps to ensure expeditious handling of materials for defence purposes. The trouble at Darwin was not alleviated, however, until the first air raid, in February 1942, drove the disturbing elements out of town, and cargo was worked by Service labour.

The importance of Darwin was at this stage emphasised by the part proposed for it in the naval plans being formulated at the Singapore Conference. On the 8th December Admiral Royle signalled to the Naval Board saying that discussions there had stressed the necessity of strengthening the lines of the Malay Barrier between Singapore and Darwin. Admiral Hart, the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet, had (Royle said) agreed to operate the cruisers *Houston*, *Marblehead* and *Boise* in the triangle East Borneo, Surabaya and Darwin; and Helfrich was being asked to station one, and later two, Dutch cruisers in the same area. Admiral Phillips had suggested that the 6-inch gun cruisers, detailed in the Australian-British-Dutch conversations of April 1941 to operate in northern Australian waters, should be based on Darwin. Disposition of these cruisers along this line should give added security to shipping in the Indian Ocean. Their main task would be: (1) to provide occasional escort for supply and troop convoys from Fremantle to Singapore; (2) to provide escort for supply and troops convoys to Ambon and Koepang; (3) to act as a striking force under American command should air or submarine reconnaissance denote the presence of enemy surface ships attempting to break through.

The proposition is attractive [continued Royle] in that it makes use of the strategical possibilities of Darwin which will undoubtedly be used at times by combined striking forces. Also it enables an Australian cruiser when not employed on escort duty to make a valuable contribution to strategic offensive while operating from an Australian base. I am in agreement with these proposals and request you to put forward to the War Cabinet a signal to the United Kingdom Government requesting the return of HMAS *Hobart* to Darwin for this purpose.

This proposal (together with a recommendation by Durnford that *Yarra* should also be returned for anti-submarine work in the Darwin area) was endorsed by the Advisory War Council on the 9th December and approved by the War Cabinet on the 11th; and the United Kingdom Government was asked to arrange for the return of the two ships. As stated above (Chapter 11) this request had apparently been anticipated by the Admiralty, and *Hobart* was already on her way to Australia, having left the Mediterranean on the 9th December. *Yarra* followed her a week later.

The question of strategic control of naval forces did not arise during the Singapore discussions, but on his return to Australia Royle told the Advisory War Council at a meeting on the 16th December that Admiral Hart might at a later date ask for *Hobart* to be placed under his command, and that he (Royle) thought that the Government should agree to this. Actually there was, throughout the month of December, lack of cohesion between the Allied naval forces in the Western Pacific. Five

different authorities—Australian, New Zealand, British, American and Dutch—controlled strategical naval dispositions, often without precise knowledge of what each other was doing.⁷ The Australian and New Zealand naval commands were in Melbourne and Wellington respectively. The British command was in Singapore where, in addition to the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* there were, on the 8th December, the light cruisers *Danae*, *Dragon* and *Durban*; and the destroyers *Jupiter*, *Electra*, *Encounter*, *Express*, *Tenedos*, *Stronghold*, *Isis* and *Vampire*. *Stronghold* and *Isis* were refitting, the last-named, a unit of the Mediterranean Fleet, in Singapore for that purpose. (Also in Singapore at the time were the Australian ships *Manoora*, *Vendetta*, and the corvettes *Burnie*, *Goulburn*, *Bendigo* and *Maryborough*.⁸ *Vendetta* was undergoing major refit. The armed merchant cruiser *Kanimbla* was on passage from Penang to Singapore.)

The Dutch naval command was at Batavia, in the west of Java, and the Dutch naval forces, with the exception of those ships already placed under the operational control of the Commander-in-Chief, China, were disposed to protect the Netherlands East Indies. On the 8th December *De Ruyter* and four destroyers covered the Lesser Sunda Islands to the east of Java; *Tromp*, which had been in the Indian Ocean searching for *Sydney*, was in the western Java Sea; the submarines *K 14*, *K 15* and *K 16*⁹ of the Third Flotilla were in the Celebes Sea off the east coast of Borneo; and submarines *O 19* and *O 20*¹ of the Fourth Flotilla patrolled the Karimata Strait. The obsolete coastal defence ship *Soerabaja*² was in the Timor Sea. The Dutch Commander-in-Chief, as he later stated, considered himself “under the strategical direction of Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, Commander-in-Chief, China”.³

The American naval command was in the Philippines where were, on the 8th December at Manila, the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Hart; his Chief of Staff, Rear-Admiral Purnell; the flag officer in command of the squadron (Task Force 5), Rear-Admiral Glassford; and the local flag officer in command, Rear-Admiral Rockwell. Ships of the Asiatic Fleet were disposed throughout the Indonesian-Philippines area. The light cruiser *Marblehead*, with destroyers *Paul Jones*, and *Stewart*, *Bulmer*, *Barker* and *Parrott* of the 58th Division were at Tarakan; the destroyers *Whipple*,

⁷ For example when, on 31 Dec 1941, Ambon reported that six warships were sighted 20 miles NE of Timor, and three were sighted about 120 miles north of Melville Island, the Central War Room COIC at Melbourne commented: “The American cruiser *Houston* and three destroyers departed Darwin at 0402/30 (GMT) and were routed to go to approximately the first of the above positions, and then after turning east, to pass the second position before reaching their rendezvous off Wednesday Island. There are several American destroyers in positions not precisely known in these waters, therefore it appears probable that the six ships sighted off Timor, and possible that the other three ships sighted, were all US warships.”

⁸ RAN corvettes, 733 tons, one 4-in gun, 16 kts, commnd Feb-Jun 1941.

⁹ Dutch submarines (1932-33), 771 tons, one 3.5-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17 kts; *K 16* sank Jap destroyer *Sagiri* 24 Dec 1941, before herself being sunk, off Kuching, on same day.

¹ Dutch submarines (1938-39), 967 tons, one 3.5-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 40 mines, 20 kts; *O 20* sunk near Kota Bharu, 19 Dec 1941; *O 19* wrecked in Jap waters, May 1945.

² *Soerabaja* (1910), 5,644 tons, two 11-in guns, 16 kts; destroyed 2 Mar 1942.

³ Vice-Admiral Helfrich, in unpublished notes: “Important events before appointment of General Wavell as Supreme Commander ABDA Area.”

Alden, *John D. Edwards* and *Edsall*⁴ of the 57th Division were at Balikpapan; the heavy cruiser *Houston*, light cruiser *Boise*, seaplane tender *Langley*,⁵ destroyers *Pope*, *Peary*, *Pillsbury* and *John D. Ford*⁶ of the 59th Division and auxiliaries, were in the Philippines. During the discussions at Manila on the 6th December, Admiral Hart told Phillips that he was sending him the four destroyers of the 57th Division to reinforce his screen, and on that day they were ordered from Balikpapan to Singapore. They arrived there, however, too late to join Phillips. On the evening of the 8th December *Houston* (flag), *Boise*, *Langley*, *Pope*, *John D. Ford* and attendant auxiliaries sailed from the Philippines for Java. Only the twenty-nine submarines of the Asiatic Fleet, the destroyers *Peary* and *Pillsbury* (which had been in collision and were under repair) and the inshore patrol, were left as naval defence of the Philippines, where remained Admirals Hart and Rockwell.

Arriving in Java the Americans established their operational base at Surabaya, in the east of the island, where Purnell exercised a *de facto* fleet command in the absence of Hart. Glassford flew his flag in *Houston* in command of Task Force 5. On the 10th December (the day *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were lost) Purnell conferred with Helfrich at Batavia, and was urged by the Dutch Commander-in-Chief to establish his base there. Purnell told him, however, that the Asiatic Fleet would remain under the strategic direction of Washington, and that Task Force 5 would operate east of a line running through Lombok Strait north along the east coast of Borneo. A major employment of the task force would be the escort of American army transports through Torres Strait. Darwin had been selected as the main base, so that, with the American area of operations in the east, Surabaya was the natural choice as an advance base. The Americans, who had earlier criticised the "over-emphasis on escort-of-convoy" in the British-Dutch concept of operations, which "would deprive naval striking forces of their necessary punch to break up Japanese amphibious and fleet attacks"⁷ thus now contributed towards this deprivation. Now it was Helfrich who objected to the American dispositions and concept of operations, on the grounds that they would prevent necessary concentration of strength and the establishment of a striking force. This was the first of a series of "painful and lamentable controversies"⁸ between the Dutch and Americans which punctuated this period. The earlier divergence of British-American views persisted regarding the importance and

⁴ US destroyers (1919-21), 1,190 tons, six 3-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 35 kts; *Stewart* wrecked at Surabaya to avoid falling into enemy hands, 2 Mar 1942; *Edsall* sunk S of Java, 1 Mar 1942.

⁵ *Langley*, US seaplane tender (1913, converted 1920-21 and further modified 1937), 10,050 tons, four 5-in guns, 15 kts; sunk S of Java, 27 Feb 1942.

⁶ US destroyers (1920), 1,190 tons, six 3-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 35 kts; *Pope* sunk in Java Sea, 1 Mar 1942, *Peary* at Darwin, 19 Feb, and *Pillsbury* in Bali Strait, 1 Mar.

⁷ Purnell, at the ADB Conference at Singapore in Apr 1941, "pointed out that over-emphasis on escort-of-convoy would deprive naval striking forces of their necessary punch to break up Japanese amphibious and fleet attacks; the British-Dutch concept of operations emphasising local defence and escort, seemed to him defensive almost to the point of defeatism". (Morison, *United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol III, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific*, p. 55.)

⁸ Helfrich, unpublished notes.

value of Singapore ("it was agreed that for Great Britain it was fundamental that Singapore be held; for the United States it was fundamental that the Pacific Fleet be held intact"—from Minutes of the Washington staff conversations, 10 February 1941) and the Americans were naturally to an extent preoccupied with the blow suffered by the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour, and their immediate attempts in the South-West Pacific to succour the Philippines, in the same way as the main concern of the British and Dutch in the area was the reinforcement and defence of Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies. In the lack of a common plan, a unified command, and adequate forces trained and exercised together, the situation did not lend itself to smooth relationships.

When, on the 10th December, news of the loss of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* reached Singapore, Admiral Layton (who had that day officially handed over to Admiral Phillips the British naval command in the Far East) was on board a ship in Singapore for passage to England. He returned to the shore, and was directed by the Admiralty to carry out the duties of Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, until the fate of Phillips was known. *Exeter*, too late to join Phillips' force, reached Singapore that day. The next day Layton told the Admiralty that his broad policy would be "to hold as much of Malaya as possible, to secure Singapore as a base for the Eastern Fleet, to keep trade moving, to effect the maximum damage by air and submarine on the enemy". He asked for all possible reinforcement of submarines, minesweepers, destroyers and aircraft to carry this policy into effect, but added: "battleships should not come further than Colombo until accompanied by cruisers, destroyers and aircraft."

In the meantime the Dutch "faithfully executed their share of the agreements and, indeed, went beyond them".⁹ As soon as it was evident that the main enemy thrust was west of Borneo, Helfrich put the three submarines of the 3rd Flotilla at Layton's disposal, and on the 12th December sent him the two boats of the 4th Flotilla also. A day or so later *De Ruyter* and the destroyers *Piet Hein*¹ and *Banckert*² were transferred from the eastern part of the archipelago to the west. Within the week after the Japanese attack the Allied naval forces in the East Indies area were thus disposed with the British and Dutch in the western part and the Americans in the east of the archipelago. Surface forces were engaged mainly on escort-of-convoy, and covering merchant ship movements. There were, for example, some 200,000 tons of Allied merchant ships in Manila Bay on the 10th December. The majority of these ships got safely away, via the Sulu Sea and Macassar Strait. Offensive operations against the Japanese were confined to those carried out by the Allied

⁹ Brooke-Popham, *Despatch on Operations in the Far East from 17th October 1940 to 27th December 1941*, p. 567.

¹ *Piet Hein*, Dutch destroyer (1927), 1,310 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; torpedoed off Bali, 19 Feb 1942.

² *Banckert*, Dutch destroyer (1929), 1,316 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; sunk at Surabaya, 2 Mar 1942.

submarines and aircraft; and though they inflicted some losses they were powerless even seriously to hamper the Japanese advance.

II

Throughout December reports of this spreading advance reached Navy Office, Melbourne. It was a period of some confusion reflected (in the light of later knowledge) in the various official and unofficial reports which were received. These varied from erroneous accounts of the bombing of San Francisco and of the presence of Japanese aircraft carriers off the west coast of America, to equally erroneous reports (originating in the belief at the time of the crews of American attacking aircraft) that a Japanese aircraft carrier had been sunk off Honolulu, and that the battleship *Haruna* had been sunk, and that *Kongo* and another unnamed battleship had been badly damaged, at the Philippines. Nearer home, gun fire was reported off Jervis Bay on the 8th December, and a submarine was "sighted" in Port Phillip Bay on the 13th.

Meanwhile, on the 9th December, Commander Long, as Director of C.O.I.C. Melbourne, produced a prescient "appreciation of Japanese situation". Recording the then known Japanese attacks on Malaya, Pearl Harbour, the Philippines, Guam, Wake, Ocean, and possibly Midway Islands, he outlined possible forms of future Japanese attack: (1) From Thailand on Malaya, possibly pushing through to Burma to cut the Burma Road. (2) On the Philippines, "endeavouring to suppress American naval and air strength in the area". (3) On the Netherlands East Indies and North Borneo in view of the vital oil supplies in North Borneo. The attack "may be from either Indo-China and Hainan or from Palau in the Carolines or from both simultaneously". (4) On the New Ireland-New Britain area from the Carolines and Marshall Islands. "In view of the strategic value of Rabaul to Japan both from a defensive and offensive point of view it is possible that an attack on this area may be launched from Truk." (5) New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Fiji-Samoa. There had been for months unidentified ship and aircraft sightings suggesting Japanese reconnaissance of this area as far south as Fiji-Samoa. "In view of the strategic value of these areas to Japan vis-à-vis American-British trans-Pacific communications it is possible that an attack may be made against one or all of these places (either invasion or a series of raids) with a view to seriously hindering our use of this area." The appreciation did not consider a direct attack against Australia and New Zealand likely at that stage. "However, coastal raids by Japanese naval units from bases in the southern Mandates are considered likely" by submarines, and "it is also likely in view of Japan's present attack against Hawaii that raids will be made by heavier units against strategic coastal areas such as Newcastle. These attacks may take the form of shelling by a squadron of naval units or air attack from aircraft carriers in view of Japan's known liking for this form of attack." The probability that Japan would send out armed merchant cruisers to operate as commerce raiders in the Pacific and Indian Oceans was also taken into account.

At this time there was in Melbourne no knowledge of the extent of the damage done to the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour. It could only be assumed that, for the time being at any rate, there could be no help from that quarter.³ During the evening of Wednesday, the 10th December, news of the loss of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* reached Navy Office, first in a Tokyo broadcast, quickly followed by an announcement in the British broadcast news. Following so rapidly on the publicity fanfare which had announced the arrival of the two ships at Singapore only a week earlier, it came as a shock. Mr Macandie, the Secretary of the Naval Board, who was working back as usual that night, dined at the Naval and Military Club and returned to Navy Office unaware of the loss of the two ships. "Passing the open door of the Third Naval Member's room on my way to my own," he later recalled, "I saw [Engineer Rear-Admiral] McNeil sitting at his desk, and stepped in for a few words. He seemed gloomy, and I commented on this. 'Things look very bad in Malaya,' he said. I answered, 'Cheer up! The *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* are there, and they're only the beginning of what we'll soon have.' He looked up at me. 'Haven't you heard?' he asked. 'They've both gone.' It took me some time to grasp it." Many others found the news equally hard to believe at first.

The situation facing the Australian Chiefs of Staff, as advisers to the Government, was thus anything but reassuring. News from both east and west suggested that such protection and support as might have been anticipated from the United States on the one hand and Britain on the other in the event of a Japanese attack would now, at the best, be considerably delayed. It was realised that, with its heavy commitments in the Middle East and the Atlantic, the Royal Navy would have grave difficulty in making good in the Far East the loss of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*. This loss brought those of British capital ships known to the Australian

* It was not until 15 Dec that the U.S. Secretary for the Navy announced the American losses as: One battleship as a result of a direct bomb hit; three modern 1,500-ton destroyers; two auxiliaries; 2,729 officers and men killed; 656 officers and men wounded; naval aircraft losses severe; army aircraft losses severe and some hangars lost; several other naval vessels damaged, some of which have been repaired and are ready for sea, while others are already at sea. A few will require some time to repair. Battleship *Oklahoma* was capsized but can be righted and repaired. The entire balance of the Pacific Fleet is unimpaired, and is at sea seeking contact with the enemy. Honolulu harbour facilities undamaged. Oil tanks and oil depots safe. Japanese losses—three submarines, 41 aircraft.

As was subsequently made public, of the eight battleships in Pearl Harbour when the Japanese attacked, four were sunk, *Arizona* (total loss); *Oklahoma* (salvaged but never returned to service); *West Virginia* and *California*. One, *Nevada*, was run aground to prevent her sinking. Three, *Maryland*, *Pennsylvania*, and *Tennessee* were damaged but remained afloat. Three of the damaged battleships were at sea in less than two weeks after the attack. All of the Pearl Harbour battleships excepting *Arizona* and *Oklahoma* subsequently took an active part in the war. The destroyers *Cassin* and *Downes* were so badly damaged as to demand complete rebuilding which was not completed until 1943; and destroyer *Shaw* had her bow blown off but was repaired by mid-1942. Three light cruisers, *Helena*, *Honolulu* and *Raleigh*, were damaged, but left Pearl Harbour by the end of January 1942. The seaplane tender *Curtiss* and repair ship *Vestal* were damaged. In all 19 ships were hit. Casualties were:

	Killed, missing, died of wounds	Wounded
Navy	2,008	710
Marine Corps	109	69
Army	218	364
Civilians	68	35
	<u>2,403</u>	<u>1,178</u>

authorities, since war broke out in 1939, to four (*Royal Oak*,⁴ *Hood*, *Prince of Wales*, *Repulse*). Against this over-all loss it was believed in Australia that three new battleships (*King George V*, *Prince of Wales*, and *Duke of York*⁵) had been added to the effective strength of the Royal Navy, thus making a net reduction of one in the pre-war total of capital ships. Actually the reduction was greater. In November, *Barham* had been sunk in the Mediterranean, a fact not known to the Australian authorities; and a week after the loss of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* the Royal Navy's total of effective battleships was to be further reduced by the disablement in Alexandria Harbour of *Valiant* and *Queen Elizabeth*, both put out of action for several months. Thus at the end of December 1941 the total of the Royal Navy's effective capital ships, fifteen at the outbreak of war in 1939, had been reduced to eleven.

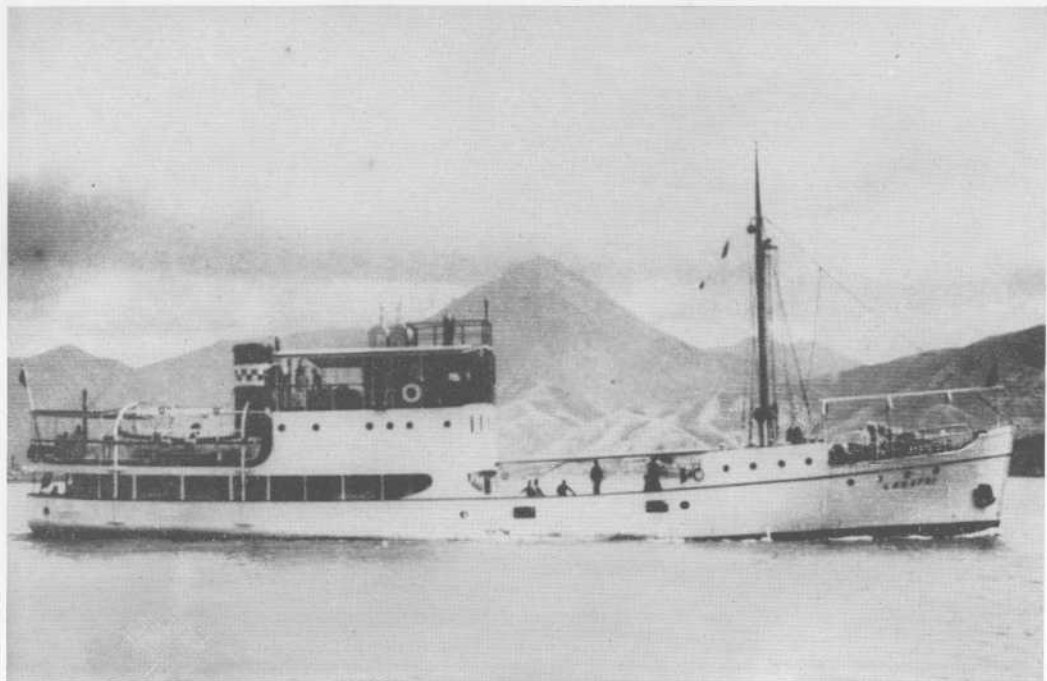
The United States Navy had a similar profit and loss account in capital ships. On the debit side two were a total loss at Pearl Harbour. Three of those there damaged took several months to repair. On the credit side two new battleships, *North Carolina* and *Washington*,⁶ had joined the Atlantic Fleet by the end of 1941 but, newly commissioned, were still in the "working up" stage. The net reduction in effective capital ship strength of the United States Navy was thus from a total of fifteen at the outbreak of war in 1939 to twelve at the end of December 1941. This made the combined British-American total of effective capital ships at that date twenty-three. Of these, the newer and faster British ships were needed in Home waters to contain the German *Tirpitz* and other heavy units, while the older ships of both the British and United States navies were unsuitable for use against the Japanese in the existing lack of air cover. It was apparent that, for the time being and the immediate future, Australia must look to her own resources.

This was the situation visualised in the Australian Chiefs of Staff appreciation of February 1941, when it had been agreed that if neither a British nor American fleet was available for operations in the East Indies area in the event of a Japanese attack, the defence of territory must depend primarily on the local forces in each area. The policy in such circumstances should be to use naval and air forces to forestall the establishment of enemy naval and air bases within striking distance of vital points, while adequate forces were retained for local defence and the security of sea communications. The main army forces in each allotted area should provide final opposition against invasion, and garrison outlying bases to ensure the continued operation of naval and air forces. Acceptance of this policy had led to reinforcement of Rabaul, and the agreement to send Australian troops to Koepang and Ambon.

⁴ HMS *Royal Oak*, battleship (1916), 29,150 tons, eight 15-in and twelve 6-in guns, two 21-in torp tubes, 21 kts; sunk by German submarine in Scapa Flow, 14 Oct 1939.

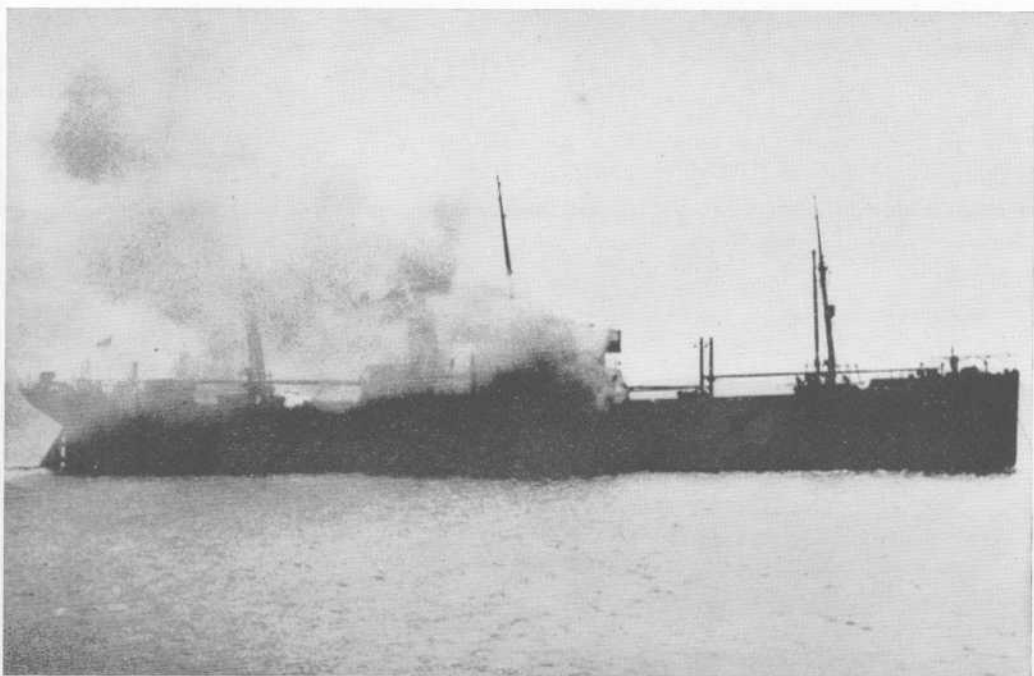
⁵ HMS *Duke of York*, battleship (1941), 35,000 tons, ten 14-in and sixteen 5.5-in guns, 28.5 kts. In his weekly progress report to the War Cabinet for the week ended 18 Oct 1941, Royle, in reporting the British decision to send *Prince of Wales* to the Far East, added: "It appeared from this information that *Duke of York* was now in commission."

⁶ *North Carolina* and *Washington*, US battleships (1941), 35,000 tons, nine 16-inch and twenty 5-in guns, A/A batteries, 28 knots.



Motor Schooner *Lakatoï*.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



Norah Moller on fire in Banka Strait, 3rd February 1942.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



(U.S. Navy)

Admiral Thomas C. Hart, U.S. Navy, C-in-C Allied Naval Forces in the Far East, January-February 1942.



(F. E. Daniell)

Vice-Admiral Conrad Helfrich, C-in-C Allied Naval Forces in the Netherlands East Indies 1942.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Japanese Bombing in Gaspar Strait, 15th February 1942 "close enough to see the ugly red flash of their burst and to feel the heat of their explosions. . . ."

As stated above, the Koepang force, 1,400 strong, sailed from Darwin on the 10th December. Two days later a painful decision regarding Rabaul was reached by the Chiefs of Staff, and approved by the War Cabinet. Only 700 miles from Truk, the powerful Japanese base in the Caroline Islands, Rabaul occupied a position of strategic importance to both Japan and Australia, both from a defensive and offensive point of view. In October 1941 the War Cabinet considered an offer by the United States to supply equipment and technical assistance for its installation (made available under Lend-Lease arrangements), to improve the defences of Rabaul so that if necessary Rabaul could be used as a naval base for operations against the Carolines and Japanese lines of communication passing to the eastward of the Philippines. The equipment was to include six 7-inch guns for coast defence, twenty anti-aircraft guns, ammunition, and other items. Australia was to provide the men to instal the equipment and man the defences.

In May 1937 Rabaul was badly damaged by volcanic eruption. During 1941 the volcano showed renewed activity, but after inspections by the Chiefs of the Naval and Air Staffs, and consultation with the geological advisers, Dr W. G. Woolnough and Dr N. H. Fisher, the Defence Committee concluded that Rabaul could still be used as a fleet base. The War Cabinet decided to accept the American offer, and to invite the United States Government to send a mission to Australia to make the necessary arrangements.⁷ Before anything could be done to further the arrangements, however, Japan attacked.

On the 9th December an unidentified twin-engine monoplane, considered to be a Japanese naval heavy bomber, was reported as making three runs over Rabaul between 10 a.m. and 10.10 a.m., strongly suggesting that the flight was photographic reconnaissance, and pointing to the possibility of early attack. (At the same time another aircraft, considered to be a Japanese reconnaissance plane, circled over Kavieng, 182 miles from Rabaul on the north-west tip of New Ireland.) In the circumstances the Chiefs of Staff considered three courses of action: (a) to reinforce the existing Rabaul garrison up to the strength of a brigade group; (b) to withdraw the existing garrison and abandon Rabaul; (c) to retain the existing garrison. They recommended adoption of the third course. The recommendation was approved by the War Cabinet at its meeting of the 12th December 1941, it being noted that "the situation is to be kept under observation and if U.S. cruisers and destroyers fall back on Darwin, sufficient naval forces may become available to reinforce and supply Rabaul". This, however, was an optimistic assembly of "ifs" and "mays". It was clear that, even had Rabaul's existing garrison been reinforced up to the strength of a brigade group, it could not, lacking control of the

⁷ Australian naval commitments would have been the provision of base staff; port war signal station; examination service; anti-submarine patrol and hunting vessels; harbour defence asdic installations; boom depot; boom working vessel; stores; and fleet tankers, as there was no oil storage at Rabaul. The army would have been responsible for manning fixed defences and anti-aircraft defences and garrisoning the base. Total additional manning would have been approximately 1,500.

sea approaches, heavy coast defence artillery and air defences (Rabaul then had two 6-inch guns and two anti-aircraft guns), have withstood, in the face of Japan's complete local sea and air control, a determined sea-borne assault. Yet the existing garrison, at a time when any delay, however small, that could be imposed upon the Japanese, was of great value to Australia, could impose such a delay, though it were sacrificed in so doing. For that reason the hard decision was taken to retain it instead of withdrawing it and abandoning Rabaul. In the meantime, plans already made to withdraw women and children from New Guinea, Papua, and Darwin were accelerated, and during December numbers were landed in Australia from the merchant ships *Katoomba*, *Neptuna*, *Zealandia*, and *Macdhui*.⁸

On the 14th December the Australian force for Ambon ("Gull Force") sailed from Darwin, a total of 1,090 troops, in the Dutch merchant ships *Both*, *Valentijn*, and *Patras*,⁹ escorted by *Adelaide* and the corvette *Ballarat* (Lieut-Commander Barling).¹ The voyage was made without incident, and "Gull Force" disembarked at Ambon on the 17th December. That day Australian and Dutch troops landed on Portuguese territory, at Dili in Timor. For some time Japanese interest in Portuguese Timor had been a matter of concern to the British, Australian, and Netherlands Indies governments. In December 1940 the Japanese, with Portuguese permission, carried out "test" flights for an air service between Palau and Dili; and a Japanese consul was appointed to Dili. Towards the end of 1941 there were indications that Japan was pressing the Portuguese Government to accept Japanese "protection" for Timor. Portuguese Timor in Japanese hands would mean an enemy base on the Australia-Malaya lines of communication; a threat to Darwin; and a hostile base in the Dutch rear. The British Government, suspicious of Japanese intentions, made the Portuguese an offer of assistance in the event of a Japanese attack. The Portuguese Government accepted this offer on the 12th December 1941, and agreed that there should be staff conversations at Singapore to work out details.

Meanwhile the Japanese had attacked, and the Dutch at Koepang produced a plan to dispatch Dutch troops thence to Dili. "Sparrow Force" was authorised to cooperate, and on the 16th December the Dutch coastal defence ship *Soerabaja* and the auxiliary vessel *Canopus* left Koepang for Dili with 400 Dutch and 250 Australian troops. These landed west of Dili on the 17th. No resistance was met, but the Portuguese Governor made strong protests. The Australians and Dutch therefore deferred full military control pending a reply from Lisbon to a message from the Governor. In Lisbon the Portuguese Government protested violently to

⁸ Of 9,424, 5,952, 6,683 and 4,561 tons respectively; *Neptuna* and *Zealandia* were sunk at Darwin, 19 Feb 1942, and *Macdhui* at Port Moresby, 18 Jun 1942.

⁹ Of 2,601, 2,071 and 2,065 tons respectively.

¹ HMAS *Ballarat*, corvette, 733 tons, one 4-in gun, 16 kts. (One of the ships built on Admiralty account, but Australian manned.) Commissioned 30 Aug 1941.

Lt-Cdr A. D. Barling, DSO, DSC; RANR(S). HMAS *Bingera* 1940-41; comd HMAS *Ballarat* 1941-43; Principal Beachmaster, Cairns 1944; HMAS *Westralia* 1944-45. Of Sydney; b. London, 26 Sep 1899.

the British and Dutch Governments. It was eventually agreed that the Allied garrison would be withdrawn from Portuguese Timor when an adequate garrison of Portuguese troops from East Africa arrived. These troops, in the troopship *Joao Belo* (6,365 tons), escorted by the sloop *Gonçalo Velho*,² left Lorencu Marques for Timor on the 28th January 1942. Speed of advance was only eight knots, and the ships were still on passage (and returned to East Africa) when the Japanese captured Timor in February.

While the Australians were thus taking steps to safeguard their northern approaches within their limited means, the Americans in the Pacific and the British at Singapore took hasty stock of the situation, and measures to meet it. Within a few hours of the attack on Pearl Harbour, Washington ordered the return to the Pacific of the aircraft carrier *Yorktown* (transferred thence to the Atlantic in April 1941) together with a destroyer squadron and three squadrons of patrol bombers. On the 10th December, three days after the attack, Admiral Kimmel, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet, was still unaware of the composition of the Japanese attacking force and whither it had retired. But he stated, in an estimate of the situation made that day, "we do know that Guam has fallen, Wake is under attack, some of the Gilbert Islands have been occupied, and enemy submarines are operating eastward from Oahu".³ Kimmel visualised that probable enemy action in the Pacific would be raids by fast striking forces on Oahu and Midway in the Hawaii Islands and on the Aleutians; raids on Wake Island "with possible landing attempts"; and raids on commerce by submarines and cruisers or armed merchant cruisers. The losses inflicted on the Pacific Fleet had caused the Navy Department, Washington, the day following the attack at Pearl Harbour, to amend the naval plan (WPL 46 of "Rainbow 5") it had intended to implement if war broke out with Japan, and to adopt temporarily a defensive role in which the immediate and broad mission of the Pacific Fleet would be to retain what America held in the Pacific as a base for future offensives while securing communications along the lines Panama-Samoa-Fiji-New Zealand; and West Coast-Pearl Harbour-Fiji-New Caledonia-Australia. There was no question of using the depleted Pacific Fleet to defend Guam or the Philippines, but plans (based on Admiral Kimmel's appreciation) were at once drawn up for the employment of three carrier groups operating from Pearl Harbour to intercept enemy raids and support other menaced bases; for the formation of battleship-destroyer escort groups to be based on San Francisco and escort convoys from the West Coast to Hawaii; and for the use of submarines offensively in Japanese waters and off Wake and Midway Islands.⁴

² *Gonçalo Velho*, Portuguese sloop (1933), 950 tons, three 4.7-in guns, 16.5 kts.

³ During December three merchant ships were sunk by Japanese submarines near or east of Hawaii; and two were sunk and one damaged by submarines off the Californian coast.

⁴ The above brief survey of American reactions and decisions condensed from Morison, Vol III, pp. 218-22.

On the day that Kimmel produced his appreciation, Layton in Malaya outlined his broad policy to meet Japanese intentions considered to be: to capture first Luzon in the Philippines and then Singapore; to blockade Hong Kong; and to leave the Netherlands East Indies to the last. "An essential part of this strategy must be to increase attacks on sea communications so that raider activity is to be expected on a large scale." Layton's broad policy had close points of similarity with Kimmel's, but, in narrow waters under increasingly effective enemy control his chances of implementing it were far flimsier than the American's. He lacked any carrier striking force, and the loss of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* meant that Japanese sea communications in the Gulf of Siam were secure except against submarine attack. On the 13th December he told the Admiralty that the Japanese plan appeared to be infiltration of Malaya from the north, and that if it succeeded the island of Singapore would become virtually a beleaguered fortress, and the naval base untenable for ships. He proposed that before this happened he should embark and take all available surface vessels either to Colombo or Batavia—preferably the former as being the probable assembly port of the main British Far Eastern Fleet. The Admiralty (who for the time being were unable to send him any reinforcements) agreed that, when he considered it necessary, he should proceed to Colombo and fly his flag on shore there.

By this time the Japanese attack was developing and yielding swift results. In the afternoon of 6th December Rear-Admiral Takagi, flying his flag in *Myoko*, with *Nachi* and *Haguro* of the 5th Cruiser Squadron; *Ryujo* of the 4th Air Flotilla; *Jintsu* and destroyers, left Palau to cover the Philippines landings at Legaspi, southern Luzon. From a position approximately 100 miles east of Davao on the southern island of Mindanao, *Ryujo's* aircraft were launched and bombed the Davao area in the early morning of the 8th. Simultaneously the first of a series of land-based attacks by Japanese aircraft was launched from Formosa on airfields in northern Luzon. They were eminently successful, and by the evening of the 8th December half the bomber strength and one-third of the fighter strength of the United States air forces in the Philippines had been destroyed. Thus, in one day, the invading surface forces were given near immunity from air attack. At about the time that *Ryujo* was launching her aircraft, the Legaspi invasion force in seven transports escorted by Rear-Admiral Kubo in *Nagara*, with *Chitose* and *Mizuho* of the 11th Air Flotilla, and destroyers, sailed from Palau. They joined up with Takagi's force in the early morning of the 9th and reached Legaspi (where they protected the Japanese rear from possible air strikes from the Visaya islands to the south, and controlled San Bernadino Strait) in the early morning of the 12th.

Meanwhile landings had been made in northern Luzon. On the evening of the 7th December three invasion forces set out. Rear-Admiral Hirose, with his Batan Island Surprise Attack Force of a destroyer and small craft, sailed from Takao and Horyo in Formosa, and reached his objective (some 130 miles north of Luzon) at dawn on the 8th. Rear-Admiral

Hara in *Natori*, with destroyers and ancillaries, and escorting six troop transports, left Mako in the Pescadores and anchored off Aparri, on the north-eastern tip of Luzon, at daybreak on the 10th. Also from Mako sailed the six transports of the Vigan invasion force, escorted by Rear-Admiral Nishimura in *Naka* with destroyers, anti-submarine vessels and minesweepers. They reached Vigan, on the north-west coast of Luzon, soon after noon on the 10th. The Commander-in-Chief, *Third Fleet*, Vice-Admiral Takahashi, in overall command of the operation, left Mako in *Ashigara* on the 8th, with *Maya*, *Kuma*, and destroyers, to give general cover. Suffering only minor losses inflicted by the dwindling American air forces, these preliminary Japanese landings were successful, and paved the way for the main invasion.

Away to the eastward, easy conquests fell to Vice-Admiral Inouye's *Fourth Fleet*, detachments from which made landings on Tarawa and Butaritari islands in the British Gilbert group on the 9th-10th December, and on the 10th (but not without losses) overwhelmed the small American garrison on Guam, and captured that island after having bombed it for two days. They were less immediately successful at Wake Island. That American outpost, garrisoned by 450 Marines and 68 naval officers and men, and harbouring about 1,200 civilians (air line officials and contractor's employees) was defended by a Marine fighter squadron of twelve aircraft, and three batteries of 3-inch and 5-inch guns. The island suffered heavy air raids on the 8th, 9th and 10th December which inflicted casualties, destroyed seven of the aircraft, and damaged some of the guns. Shortly after midnight on the 10th, Rear-Admiral Kajioka's invasion force of *Yubari* (flag) and six destroyers escorting four transports, with *Tenryu* and *Tatsuta* in support, arrived off the island. Landings, preceded by a ship-to-shore bombardment, were attempted soon after dawn on the 11th, but ended in complete failure. The Japanese lost two destroyers—*Hayate* and *Kisaragi*⁵ blown up by shore battery gun fire. At 7 a.m. Kajioka broke off the action and retired to Kwajalein, to "make another attempt when conditions were more favourable".⁶

IV

Within three weeks of their opening strokes the Japanese had neutralised the Malay and Philippine areas, had temporarily secured themselves in the east, and had begun their swift deployment over the whole of the South-West Pacific archipelago region down to the Malay Barrier, an area of some two million square miles. With them, as with their enemies, it was a race against time. Their urgent need was to secure and utilise the rich oil resources before installations could be destroyed, and to forestall reinforcements, particularly air reinforcements. It was necessary for them to act quickly, and as near as could be simultaneously, in all areas. The

⁵ *Hayate* and *Kisaragi*, Japanese destroyers (1925), 1,270 and 1,500 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts.

⁶ Captain Koyama, who was in *Yubari*. Morison, Vol III, p. 234. According to Morison, *Yubari*, *Tenryu*, *Tatsuta*, and destroyers *Oite* and *Yayoi* were damaged.

Allies, on the other hand, were pitted against time in their endeavour to rush in reinforcements, and meanwhile to hold the invaders wherever and whenever possible. On both sides naval emphasis was on escort of convoy. The Japanese knew that an Allied naval force existed in the Java Sea area, and believed that it included "several" cruisers. Because of their own problems of surface cover and close escort for landing forces in simultaneous operations over wide areas the Japanese, however, felt compelled to utilise every ship on these duties. They had neither the time nor the vessels to consider active operations against the Allied fleet. That fleet, had it been under unified command, and had the pre-determined (February 1941) policy "to use naval and air forces to forestall the establishment of enemy naval and air bases within striking distance of vital points" been adhered to, could possibly have imposed some delay on the enemy at this stage. But Allied concern with reinforcement and the protection of the convoys militated against the formation of a striking force, and the Americans and British, apparently convinced that an immediate and essential part of Japanese strategy would be attacks on sea communications, with raider activity on a large scale,⁷ employed all their surface forces on escort-of-convoy duties, with seemingly little or no reference to each other, evidenced by the fact that on the 14th December Admiral Layton told the Admiralty that he was unable to obtain any communication from Admiral Hart.

Attempts to achieve some cohesion were, however, now being made, both locally and on the highest British-American government levels. On the 12th December Mr Churchill, with a staff of eighty, headed by the naval and air chiefs of staff, General Dill,¹ and Lord Beaverbrook,² the Minister of Supply, sailed from Glasgow in the new battleship *Duke of York* for the United States and discussions with President Roosevelt and the American Chiefs of Staff. They reached Washington on the 22nd. Before sailing, Mr Churchill appointed Mr Duff Cooper³ (who had been Minister of State in the Far East since July 1941) Resident Cabinet Minister at Singapore for Far Eastern Affairs. Duff Cooper, on the 19th December, formed at Singapore a War Council over which he presided and on which Mr V. G. Bowden,⁴ Australia's Official Representative at Singapore, represented the Australian Government. On the 18th December, consequent on a proposal by President Roosevelt that inter-allied

⁷ Actually the Japanese, right throughout the war, made no consistent attempt to disrupt Allied lines of communication. They made little use of their regular surface forces in such warfare (practically none after November 1942, from when on they were too much concerned with protecting their own communications) and even their submarine campaign was sporadic and inconsistent. Only two Japanese armed merchant cruisers, *Aikoku Maru* (10,437 tons) and *Hokoku Maru* (10,439 tons) operated during the war, and their period of operation was exceptionally short and not very successful.

¹ Field Marshal Sir John Dill, GCB, CMG, DSO. GOC I Corps in France 1939-40; CIGS War Office 1940-41. B. Belfast, Ireland, 25 Dec 1881. Died 4 Nov 1944.

² Rt Hon Lord Beaverbrook. Minister of Information 1918, for Aircraft Production 1940-41, of Supply 1941-42; Lord Privy Seal 1943-45. B. Maple, Ontario, Canada, 25 May 1879.

³ Rt Hon Viscount Norwich, GCMG, DSO. Minister of Information 1940-41; Ambassador to France 1944-47. B. 1890. Died 1 Jan 1954.

⁴ V. G. Bowden, CBE. (With BEF in France 1915-19, Major RE.) Aust Govt Commissioner in China 1935-41. Official Representative in Singapore 1941-42. B. Sydney, 28 May 1884. Executed by Japanese, 17 Feb 1942.

military conferences be arranged at Chungking, Singapore, and Moscow, to agree on preliminary recommendations "to prepare the way for common action against common enemies", such a conference was held at Singapore. Australian representatives were Major-General Gordon Bennett,⁵ commanding the A.I.F. in Malaya; Captain Collins, R.A.N., then in Singapore as Assistant Chief of Staff to Layton; and Group Captain McCauley,⁶ R.A.A.F. The conference, among other recommendations, reaffirmed the policy formulated in February 1941—to keep the enemy as far north as possible, and to prevent him acquiring territory and particularly aerodromes which would threaten the arrival of reinforcements. A sub-committee of the conference recommended as the naval contribution towards these ends, the maintenance of the strongest possible striking force in the South China and West Java seas, built up on British and Dutch naval forces then available, and the reinforcement of the submarine force based on Singapore;⁷ and the maintenance of the strongest possible striking force in the Celebes Sea and Macassar Strait area, built up on the American Task Force 5 and the local Dutch forces. The conference also detailed the minimum air and army reinforcements considered immediately necessary in Malaya "to stabilise the situation"; and suggested that aircraft in an American convoy destined for the Philippines and then making through the South Pacific for Brisbane, should be sent to Surabaya.

A similar suggestion: "the despatch to Singapore and adjacent areas through Australia of U.S.A. air reinforcements hitherto intended for the Philippines", was made to the United Kingdom Government by the Australian Government on the 17th December. It was one of a number recommended by the Advisory War Council after hearing Admiral Royle's report on his return from Singapore. The council reached the conclusion that certain earlier expressed opinions of the British Chiefs of Staff required revision in the light of Royle's report, these including the view that "the majority of the 450 shore-based aircraft which the Japanese can marshal against us are of obsolete types and, as we have said, we have no reason to believe that Japanese standards are even comparable with those of the Italians. We have already drawn attention to our experience when heavily outnumbered during the Libyan campaign as well as at Malta and in the air defence of Great Britain."⁸ The Australian Government also stressed the need of aircraft carriers "in the area east of Suez" and emphasised that if Britain could not provide one the United States should be asked to do so. In addition, the Australian Government suggested that, "in view of the geographical position of Malaya and adjacent islands, an

⁵ Lt-Gen H. Gordon Bennett, CB, CMG, DSO, VD. (1st AIF: Comd 6 Bn 1915-16, 3 Inf Bde 1916-19.) GOC 8 Div 1940-42, III Corps 1942-44. Public accountant and company director; of Sydney; b. Balwyn, Vic, 16 Apr 1887.

⁶ Air Marshal Sir John McCauley, KBE, CB. Dep Chief of Air Staff RAAF 1942-44, 1946-47; Air Cmdre Ops 2 TAF, European Theatre, 1944-45; Chief of Staff BCOF, Japan, 1947-49; Chief of Air Staff RAAF 1954-57. B. Sydney, 18 Mar 1899.

⁷ These were Dutch vessels. There were then no British submarines in Far Eastern waters. *Trusty* and *Truant* were ordered there from the Mediterranean on 22 Dec 1941.

⁸ C.O.S. Paper (41) 230.

essential corollary of the operation of a British fleet in these waters is naval control of all land-based aircraft except those allotted for army cooperation". This arose from Royle telling the Advisory War Council that he thought that better results would be achieved in air cooperation with the navy if that service had control of the Air Coastal Command in Malaya, as in the United Kingdom. There was (said Royle) evidence that our air organisation in Malaya was not effective. At noon on Monday, 8th December, the Japanese transports were not being attacked at all from the air. There were 29 torpedo-carrying aircraft in Malaya, which could have done great damage to the Japanese warships and transports, but they had not been employed. He was not aware of the reason for this.⁹

In the meantime, offensive operations against the Japanese were confined to those carried out by Dutch submarines, and by aircraft. The Dutch submarines, based on Singapore and operating under the strategic control of Admiral Layton, did particularly gallant and useful work in these early days of the Japanese advance. They inflicted most of the damage and losses suffered by the enemy's seaborne forces, and themselves suffered heavily in so doing. They were first in action in the defence of Malaya, attacking the Japanese landing forces at Kota Bharu, Patani, and Singora. On the 12th December *K 12* sank the transport *Toro Maru* (1,939 tons) off Kota Bharu; and the same day *O 16* attacked and severely damaged the transports *Tosan Maru* (8,666 tons), *Sakina Maru* (7,170 tons), *Ayato Maru* (9,788 tons), and *Asosan Maru* (8,812 tons) at Patani. On the 13th December *K 12* sank a naval tanker, *Taisan Maru* (3,525 tons) near Kota Bharu.¹⁰ *O 16* did not long survive her success. On her return passage to Singapore she ran into the British East Johore minefield, and was lost with only one survivor. Within a few days the Dutch submarine force was further depleted. *O 20* was sunk by gun fire from a Japanese destroyer near Kota Bharu on the 19th December; and on the 21st *K 17* was destroyed in a depth charge attack near Singora.

The Dutch, however, achieved more successes when, in the middle of the month, the Japanese made their first move against Borneo, and found "air and submarine attacks more tenacious than in other areas".¹ The Japanese overall plan for the invasion of the Netherlands East Indies (to be carried out concurrently with the operations in Malaya and the Philippines) envisaged two main southwards advances; one from the west and one from the east, with subsidiary enveloping branches springing out on either hand as the advance progressed. That in the west, spreading southwards from Camranh Bay in Indo-China, would secure British

⁹ As stated in Chapter 13, during the night of the 7-8 December, aircraft of the RAF and RAAF made persistent attacks on the ships, and sank *Awagisan Maru*. Later attempts to attack the transports by air failed because they had withdrawn behind the Perhentian Islands.

¹⁰ It is possible that the ship believed to be *Taisan Maru* was in reality the burnt-out *Awagisan Maru* (9,794 tons), which was bombed during the first assault landing on 8 Dec. Admiral Helfrich in his "Notes" recorded the damage to the four transports at Patani (previously considered by the Dutch authorities to have been sunk) as confirmed by Japanese reports received by the Dutch Historical Section, Naval Staff, the Hague, in Apr 1952. A Japanese document of 17 Jan 1946, File No. M277—Malaya Landing Operation, states that on the 14 Dec at Patani "three vessels were damaged with no casualties of military personnel on board".

¹ "Invasion of the Dutch East Indies"; an ATIS translation of a Japanese account. (AL1096.)

Borneo and Sumatra; that in the east, stemming from Davao in the Philippines, would overwhelm Dutch Borneo, Celebes, Ambon, and the Lesser Sunda Islands, including Timor. The spearhead of the advance would be the air weapon, the scope of which would be progressively widened as air bases were secured. Both navy (land and ship-based), and army aircraft would be used. It was anticipated that by the end of February 1942, air supremacy would be attained over the entire Dutch East Indies area from bases on Celebes, Borneo, and Sumatra. The main body of Japanese invasion forces in the Dutch East Indies would then attack Java from the east and west simultaneously.

The first objective in this plan was, for two reasons, the island of Borneo. Lying as it does athwart the main sea route from the north to Malaya and Sumatra on the west and to Celebes, Moluccas, and New Guinea on the east, it occupies a position of great strategic importance; and one which it was as needful for the Japanese to deny to their enemies as to secure for themselves. In addition, it held one of Japan's main and urgent requirements—oil. Because the Philippine Islands launching place at Davao was not at that time available to the Japanese, while Camranh Bay was, and, additionally, to secure the southern flank of their advance on Malaya, the initial Japanese stroke was made by the western force against British Borneo, along a stretch of some sixty miles from Seria in Brunei to Miri and Lutong in adjoining Sarawak. The two groups of oil fields were at the first mentioned places, and the refinery to which their crude oil was pumped was at Lutong.

The Japanese invasion force (the *124th Regiment* augmented by the *2nd Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force*) in ten transports escorted by three destroyers and smaller craft, with the seaplane tenders *Yura* and *Kamikawa Maru* attached for reconnaissance duties, sailed from Camranh Bay in the afternoon of the 13th December. The heavy cruisers *Kumano* and *Suzuya* of the *7th Cruiser Squadron* and (after the 18th December) the light cruiser *Kinu* and destroyer *Fubuki*, were in support. Passage of the South China Sea was made without incident, and the convoy arrived off Miri, Seria and Lutong, and made pre-dawn landings on the 16th of the month. Neither the British nor the Dutch had the forces or facilities to defend Borneo and, before the Japanese invasion, the oil fields, and the refinery at Lutong, were severely damaged. There was therefore no opposition to the Japanese who, though hampered by heavy weather, were ashore by daylight. The ships were, however, attacked next day, the 17th, by Dutch aircraft, and flying-boat X 32 sank the destroyer *Shinonome*² at Miri, where, also, flying-boat X 33 damaged a small transport.

On the 22nd December the main body of the Japanese force (two battalions) left Miri in six transports to assault Kuching, some 370 miles along the coast just within the south-western tip of Sarawak. One battalion

² *Shinonome*, Japanese destroyer (1928), 1,700 tons, six 5-in guns, nine 24-in torp tubes, 34 kts. Admiral Helfrich records the loss of *Shinonome* by air attack ("initially this ship was considered as having struck a mine") as confirmed in "most recent Japanese data received Apr 1952". An earlier Japanese document, "Occupation of British Borneo, AL.1096, Dec 1941" records "Enemy air attacks 17-18 Dec. Destroyer *Shinonome* sunk by bomb."

of Japanese remained to secure British North Borneo. Kuching, which had an airfield and was only sixty miles north-east of the important Dutch airfield at Sinkawang (which in turn was only 350 miles due east of Singapore) was, for these reasons, defended by a small military force. The Japanese convoy, guarded by the naval force (less *Shinonome*) which had been the escort from Camranh Bay, was sighted and reported by Dutch reconnaissance aircraft on the morning of the 23rd December, when about 150 miles from Kuching. An air striking force at Sinkawang II airfield was unable to take off because of damage to the runways by a Japanese bombing attack that morning.³ That evening, however, the Dutch submarine *K 14* successfully attacked the convoy as it arrived at Kuching. Two transports, *Hie Maru* (4,943 tons) and *Katori Maru* (9,849 tons) were sunk, and one, *Hokkai Maru* (8,416 tons) was badly damaged, as was also the naval tanker *Tonan Maru No. 2* (19,262 tons). The next night another Dutch submarine, *K 16*, torpedoed and sank the destroyer *Sagiri*⁴ off Kuching. *K 16*, on her return passage to Singapore, was surprised and sunk by the Japanese submarine *I 66*.⁵

The Japanese force had further losses on the 26th December, when a Dutch Glenn Martin bomber sank *Minesweeper No. 6* (615 tons) and *Unyo Maru No. 2* (2,827 tons).

These efforts, however, gallant though they were, scarcely hampered the enemy. The detached Japanese left in North Borneo occupied Labuan on the 3rd January 1942, and Jesselton five days later. On the 19th of the month they entered Sandakan, the seat of Government of British North Borneo, and there the Governor surrendered the State and was interned with his staff after all had refused to carry on the administration under Japanese control. In Sarawak the defenders (a battalion of Indian troops—2/15th Punjab—the native Volunteer Corps and Coastal Marine Service, the armed police, and the Sarawak Rangers, a body of native troops) retired to Dutch West Borneo under frequent Japanese attack. At the border, which was reached on the 27th December, the Sarawak State forces were released to return to their homes, and the much-reduced 2/15th Punjab continued alone and cooperated with the Dutch defenders. (Their remnants, a formed and disciplined body to the end, surrendered on the 9th March 1942, after the fall of Java.)

Although the Allied naval forces in the area did not retard the Japanese advance, enemy apprehensions of naval attack did, at this time (early December 1941), impose some delay upon it. The Japanese concluded that the United States Asiatic Fleet had withdrawn to the Netherlands East Indies "to combine with the Dutch". They also believed that a powerful "British Asiatic Fleet" (with two aircraft carriers, three battleships, and seven "first class" cruisers as nucleus) was operating in the Indian Ocean. This belief caused them to divert ships from the Philippines to

³ The airfield was so badly damaged that, with the concurrence of Air Headquarters, Far East, the aircraft were flown to Palembang, Sumatra, on 24 Dec.

⁴ *Sagiri*, Japanese destroyer (1931), 1,700 tons, six 5-in guns, nine 24-in torp tubes, 34 kts.

⁵ *I 66*, Japanese submarine (1932), 1,638 tons, one 4-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 19 kts.

the Malay area, resulting in a shortage of escort vessels which delayed the offensive against Mindanao and Jolo, and in turn delayed the start of the invasion of the Netherlands East Indies by about ten days.

The Japanese were in error in their estimate of British naval strength in the Indian Ocean. The formation of an Eastern Fleet remained—as it had been in August 1941—the long-term policy of the Admiralty. Then it had been hoped to have a considerable and balanced fleet in the Indian Ocean by the end of January 1942. Intervening events, involving the loss of ships in the Far East and the Mediterranean, now set back this date to April 1942, when it was hoped to have a fleet built on five modern capital ships, four “R” class battleships, and three or four carriers, available. In the meantime there were in the Indian Ocean only one small carrier, *Hermes*, with a capacity of fifteen aircraft; the battleship *Revenge*; and a few old cruisers engaged on convoy work. The new aircraft carrier *Indomitable*, having refitted in the United States after her grounding in the West Indies, was on passage to Capetown, where she was due on the 1st January 1942. On the 23rd December the Admiralty informed interested authorities that the following would form part of the Eastern Fleet: *Revenge*, *Royal Sovereign*, *Danae*, *Durban*, *Dragon*, *Jupiter*, *Encounter*, *Electra*, *Express*, and H.M.A.S. *Vampire*.⁶

By the middle of December the main invasion of the Philippines was under way. On the 17th of the month the Mindanao force of fourteen transports escorted by *Jintsu* (Rear-Admiral Tanaka), and destroyers and smaller craft, left Palau. They arrived off Davao during the night 19th-20th December, and landed with little opposition. Support was provided by Rear-Admiral Takagi in *Myoko*, with *Nachi* and *Haguro*, *Ryujo* of the 4th Air Flotilla, and *Chitose* of the 11th. The object of the operation was to enable deployment of naval land-based air units in the area, and to secure advanced bases for the invasion of the Netherlands East Indies. On the evening of the 20th the Japanese set up a seaplane base just south of Davao, and the security of the invasion was assured. On the 22nd December nine transports of this Mindanao force, escorted by *Jintsu* and destroyers, left Davao for Jolo Island, midway between Mindanao and Borneo. Landings began before dawn on the 25th and the island was secured by noon. The next day a naval air station was established there.

The main assault against Luzon coincided with that on Mindanao. In the afternoon of the 18th December twenty-seven transports, escorted by Rear-Admiral Hara in *Natori*, with six destroyers and smaller craft, left Takao, Formosa, for Lingayen, where they arrived at 1.10 a.m. on the 22nd. The second echelon of twenty-eight transports, escorted by Nishimura in *Naka* with seven destroyers and smaller ships, sailed from Mako in the Pescadores and reached Lingayen at midnight on the 22nd. On the 17th December the third echelon of twenty-one transports escorted by Rear-Admiral Hirose's 2nd Base Unit departed from Keelung, on the

⁶ With the substitution of *Danae*, *Durban* and *Dragon*, for *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, and with the addition of *Royal Sovereign*, this was the composition of “part of the Eastern Fleet” announced by the Admiralty on 24 Nov 1941.

northern tip of Formosa, and anchored at Lingayen in the early morning of the 23rd December. Cover was provided by Vice-Admiral Takahashi in *Ashigara*, with *Maya*, *Kuma*, and the seaplane tenders *Sanyo Maru* (8,360 tons) and *Sanuki Maru* (7,158 tons). Takahashi left Mako on the 19th December and supported the operation from an area about 250 miles west of Luzon, where he was joined by Vice-Admiral Kondo's distant cover force of *Kongo*, *Haruna*, and three heavy cruisers. The Japanese were apprehensive of surface attack from the south—but none was forthcoming. Coincidental with the Lingayen assault was that on Lamón Bay, across the narrowing neck of Luzon from Manila. The twenty-four transports carrying this landing force sailed from Amami O Shima, away north in the Ryukyu Islands, on the 17th December, and were escorted by Rear-Admiral Kubo in *Nagara*, with destroyers and smaller vessels of the *1st Base Unit*. This escort force had gone north for the task after supporting the earlier Legaspi landings. The convoy entered Lamón Bay before dawn on the 24th December.

The invading forces were attacked by submarines of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet, and by aircraft, but the casualties they inflicted "disturbed the enemy less than did the weather".⁷ The converted minelayer *Hayo Maru* (5,446 tons) was sunk by submarine *S38*⁸ at Lingayen on the 22nd December, and the small freighter *Hayataka Maru* (836 tons) was sunk by *Seal*⁹ the next day. But the few ships and aircraft of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet were unable to prevent, or even delay, the Japanese from landing wherever they chose. On the 3rd January 1942, they occupied Manila and, so far as they were concerned, "this ended the naval phase of operations in the Philippines invasion".¹

IV

In the meantime, the situation in Malaya was moving towards that envisaged by Admiral Layton on the 13th December, with Singapore becoming "virtually a beleaguered fortress". On the 11th December the Japanese, having captured the airfields in Northern Malaya, switched their major air attack to Penang. Ships were withdrawn thence to Indian ports the next day. On the 15th Lieut-General Percival² reported the situation at Penang as serious, and it was decided to abandon the port, which was occupied by Japanese troops on the 19th December. The enemy's southward advance continued, and by the 23rd December all British aircraft in Malaya had been withdrawn to Singapore. On the 27th of the month Lieut-General Sir Henry Pownall,³ who had arrived in Singapore on the 23rd, succeeded Air Chief Marshal Brooke-Popham as

⁷ Morison, Vol III, p. 179.

⁸ *S38*, US submarine (1924), 800 tons, one 3-in gun, four 21-in torp tubes, 14.5 kts.

⁹ *Seal*, US submarine (1938), 1,450 tons, one 4-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17 kts.

¹ "Japanese Naval Operations in the Invasion of the Philippines." ATIS translation of Japanese documents. (AL.1311.)

² Lt-Gen A. E. Percival, CB, DSO, OBE, MC. BGS I Corps BEF 1939-40; Asst CIGS War Office 1940; GOC Malaya Command 1941-42. B. Aspenden, Herts, Eng, 26 Dec 1887.

³ Lt-Gen Sir Henry Pownall, KCB, KBE, DSO, MC. Dir of Mil Ops and Intell, War Office, 1938-39; CGS BEF 1939-40; Vice-CIGS War Office 1941; C-in-C Far East Dec 1941-Jan 1942; C of S to Supreme Allied Cdr, S-E Asia 1943-44. B. 19 Nov 1887.

Commander-in-Chief, Far East. The Japanese were now extending their fight for strategic airfields from Malaya to Borneo. The Philippines were a wasting asset, and if Malaya were not to follow them, quick action in the provision of troops to hold ground and aircraft to attack enemy airfields was necessary.

The matter of lack of cohesion between the Allies in meeting the situation was stressed by Australia's Official Representative at Singapore, Mr. Bowden, in a message to the Australian Government on the 29th December:

The Chief of Staff of Admiral Helfrich [he said] visited Singapore yesterday to express to Layton his Admiral's concern at "lack of cooperative spirit" shown by the Supreme War Council, Washington. Helfrich and Layton would like U.S. Asiatic Fleet to be based at Batavia or Surabaya but Washington has instructed Admiral Glassford to base the fleet on Darwin. Layton yesterday cabled strong personal representations on this matter to the member of the Admiralty now in Washington. Layton did not repeat this cable to Australia, reason he gave being that it was "purely a personal message", adding that Canberra would be automatically informed if any official action arose therefrom. Pownall said he intended to cable War Office representing that at present Britain and America are conducting two entirely separate wars in Malaya and the Philippines, where Japan had the advantage of centralised command. Intends to urge the importance of setting up supreme inter-allied command to direct all phases of Pacific war including disposal of forces available.

Admiral Royle took note of the weak Singapore convoy escort situation, and suggested to the Advisory War Council that Australian naval help might be offered. In a report considered by the council on the 31st December, Royle said that nine important convoys would arrive at Singapore between the 3rd and 29th January 1942, the one conveying fifty-one Hurricanes⁴ (fighter aircraft) being due on the 8th January. The Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, had sent a message to the Admiralty which showed that there was a shortage of cruisers for escort duty in the West Java Sea. In view of the vital importance of Singapore in later stages of the war when a fleet was established there, and also as it was evident that the Japanese were not operating off the east coast of Australia, he recommended that the Australian Government should offer *Australia* and *Perth* as a covering force for the area. They would be away about a month, and he considered that the risk could be accepted as there was a regular flow of shipping to Australia from the United States some of which was escorted by United States cruisers. The Advisory War Council did not, however, agree; and that day the War Cabinet approved the Council's recommendation that the proposed offer should not be made, but that the matter should be further considered in the event of a request for assistance being made to the Government.

By this time the Government were aware that an agreement had been reached between Churchill and Roosevelt regarding unity of command

⁴ This convoy reached Singapore on 13 Jan. The next day Mr Churchill cabled to the Australian Prime Minister, Mr Curtin: "The vital convoy, including the American transport *Mount Vernon* [24,300 tons], carrying fifty Hurricanes, one anti-tank regiment, fifty guns; one heavy anti-aircraft regiment, fifty guns; one light anti-aircraft regiment, fifty guns; and the 54th British Infantry Brigade Group, total about 9,000, reached Singapore safely and punctually yesterday." Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol IV (1951), p. 11.

in the South-West Pacific, and this possibly influenced their decision regarding Royle's suggestion. On the 29th December Churchill outlined this agreement in a cable to the Australian Government. The salient points were:

(a) That unity of command should be established in the South-West Pacific; (b) that General Wavell should be appointed Commander-in-Chief or "Supreme Commander" of all U.S., British Empire, and Dutch forces of land, sea and air, assigned by the Governments concerned to that theatre; (c) that General Wavell should have an American officer as Deputy Commander-in-Chief; (d) that the American, British, Australian and Dutch naval forces in the theatre should be placed under command of the American admiral in accordance with the general principle set forth in (a) and (b); (e) that Wavell should have a staff in the South-West Pacific "accessible as Foch's High Control Staff was to the Great Staffs of the British and French armies in France", and that he would receive his orders from an appropriate joint body who would be responsible to Churchill as Minister for Defence and to Roosevelt as Commander-in-Chief of all United States forces; (f) that the principal commanders comprised in Wavell's sphere would be C.-in-C. Burma, C.-in-C. Singapore and Malaya, C.-in-C. Netherlands East Indies, C.-in-C. Philippines, and C.-in-C. Southern Communications via South Pacific and North Australia; (g) that India and Australia, who would have their own C.-in-C., would be outside Wavell's sphere except as above mentioned, and are the two great nations through which men and material from Great Britain and the Middle East on the one hand and the United States on the other could be moved into the fighting zone; (h) that the United States navy would remain responsible for the whole of the Pacific Ocean east of the Philippines and Australasia, including the U.S. approaches to Australasia.

The War Cabinet considered the cable at its meeting on the 30th December, and decided to assent to the text of the agreement, and to inform Churchill that it was expected that Australia would be included in the composition of the "appropriate joint body" referred to in subparagraph (e); and also to seek information as to the strength of forces it was intended to make available.

It was a pity that knowledge of this agreement had not reached the Australian Prime Minister a few days earlier. It might then have spared the publication of a signed article by him in *The Herald*, Melbourne, in which he made a plea for American aid. The appeal to America was unnecessary, since, strategically, Australia was every bit as important to America as America was to Australia, as was shown in the terms of the agreement reached between Churchill and Roosevelt regarding unity of command in the South-West Pacific.⁵

V

By the end of December 1941, the Japanese front line ran roughly from the mouth of the Perak River on the west coast of Malaya across

⁵ This point was seized upon by the Australian Chiefs of Staff in a cablegram they prepared on 20 Jan 1942 for transmission to Churchill in reply to one from him outlining the proposal to establish the naval area "Anzac". The final paragraph read: "The importance of Australia as a base for American operations has been indicated by the conclusions reached by the President and yourself, and it is also apparent from information of their plans conveyed to us by General Brett and his staff. We hope however that the Americans have a full realisation of the fact that their capacity to launch a counter-offensive might be frustrated by inadequate naval strength in this region." This draft was approved and adopted by the War Cabinet.

to Kuantan on the east coast; continued E.S.E. over the South China Sea to the southern border of Sarawak which it followed to that of North Borneo and on to that island's east coast; thence via the Sulu Archipelago to Mindanao; then, swinging southwards to the equator and eastwards to the Gilbert Islands; whence it ran northwards to Wake Island and onwards to the Kuriles. Far to the north of this line on its west-east section, Hong Kong, which the Japanese initially attacked with powerful forces on the Chinese mainland on the 8th December, was finally overwhelmed after stiff resistance, and formally and unconditionally surrendered by the Governor and Commander-in-Chief, Sir Mark Young,⁶ on Christmas Day. Of Hong Kong's small naval force of three destroyers and some torpedo boats, two destroyers, *Thanet* and *Scout*,⁷ were ordered to Singapore on the 8th December. They reached Tarakan on the 12th, and proceeded on to Singapore where they joined the Malaya command.

The Australian corvettes, *Burnie*, *Goulburn*, *Bendigo* and *Maryborough*, of the 21st Minesweeping Flotilla under Commander Cant in *Maryborough*, spent the month of December minesweeping, patrolling and escorting in the Singapore vicinity. The two Australian armed merchant cruisers, *Manoora* and *Kanimbla*, which were in Singapore on the 8th December, did not remain there. *Manoora* sailed at 6.30 that morning for Calcutta, and spent December escorting convoys in the Bay of Bengal. *Kanimbla* formed part of an escort group of which *Java* was senior officer and which included *Stronghold*, *Encounter*, *Tenedos* and *Evertsen*, which sailed from Singapore on the 12th December escorting a convoy of four British and three American ships. The convoy dispersed just south of Sunda Strait on the 16th. The rest of the escort returned to Singapore but *Kanimbla* proceeded on to Australia, and berthed at Port Melbourne on Christmas Day. She had been continuously overseas for just over two years, having sailed from Sydney for Singapore on the 13th December 1939.

Away at the north-east corner of the Japanese front line Wake Island, like Hong Kong, had been forced to surrender to overwhelming force, two days before the British island capitulated. Twelve days after its failure to take Wake on the 11th December, Admiral Inouye's *Fourth Fleet* mounted a second and more formidable attack. The actual invasion force—Rear-Admiral Kajioka in *Yubari*, with *Tenryu*, *Tatsuta*, six destroyers, a transport, minelayer, and a seaplane tender loaded with some 2,000 "Special Naval Landing Force troops" (Marines)—was supported by Rear-Admiral Goto's *6th Cruiser Squadron*, *Aoba*, *Kinugasa*, *Furutaka* and *Kako* and destroyers, which had supported the invasion of Guam; and by a carrier striking force—*Soryu* and *Hiryu*, with heavy cruisers *Tone* and *Chikuma*—detached from the Pearl Harbour striking force on its way home to Japan. Preceded by eight days of intensive bombing by land-based and carrier-borne aircraft, the assault landings were launched in the early hours of the 23rd December. Before dawn the Japanese had

⁶ Sir Mark Young, GCMG (served European war 1915-18), Governor of Tanganyika 1938-41, of Hong Kong 1941, 1946. Of Winchester, Eng; b. 30 Jun 1886.

⁷ HMS's *Thanet* and *Scout*, destroyers (1919), 905 tons, two 4-in guns, two 21-in torp tubes, 31 kts; *Thanet* sunk off Malaya, 27 Jan 1942.

secured a firm beach-head and were ashore in strength capable of crushing the defenders at any point. The island was surrendered to the victors soon after 7 a.m.

At that time an American relief force commanded by Rear-Admiral Fletcher—the aircraft carrier *Saratoga*, with heavy cruisers *Astoria*, *Minneapolis*, and *San Francisco* and destroyers—was on its way to Wake Island from Pearl Harbour. Two other similarly constituted striking forces, Admiral Brown's *Lexington* force and Admiral Halsey's *Enterprise* group, were in distant support. But on the morning of the 23rd December Fletcher was 425 miles from the island, and, on orders from Pearl Harbour, the relief attempt was abandoned and the three forces were recalled.

Apart from this one abortive advance against the Japanese, Allied naval activity in the Pacific and to the north and north-east of Australia was, during December 1941, confined to the protection of communications, and the covering and escorting of convoys carrying reinforcements to operational areas and advance bases. Immediately Japan attacked, trans-Pacific merchant ship sailings were suspended by the British and American Governments, which latter also suspended sailings on the American Pacific coast. All eastbound ships in the Western Pacific were ordered to make for the nearest British port; and all ships bound from Australia for the United Kingdom were instructed to proceed via the Cape. With the situation stabilised, the United States ordered resumption of coastal sailings north of Panama, and trans-Pacific sailings by unescorted ships were resumed in widely dispersed routes south of Panama.

It will be recalled that, towards the end of November, the American Chiefs of Staff asked their Government for time in the negotiations then proceeding with Japan because, among other reasons, convoys of troops to reinforce the Philippines were at sea in the Pacific. One of these, of eight ships⁸ escorted by the cruiser U.S.S. *Pensacola*, and carrying some hundreds of troops and airmen, and many aircraft, left San Francisco on the 21st November, and was passing through the Phoenix Islands when the Japanese struck Pearl Harbour. It was thereupon diverted to Suva, where it arrived safely on the 12th December, being then under orders to proceed thence to Brisbane. That day *Canberra* (Captain Farncomb) and *Perth* (Captain H. M. L. Waller⁹) sailed from Sydney to cover the convoy on this final stage of its journey. The two cruisers reached Brisbane, where Rear-Admiral Crace hoisted his flag in *Canberra* on the 15th, and that day sailed for the vicinity of New Caledonia. Here they were joined by H.M.N.Z.S. *Achilles*, which (having returned to New Zealand from Port Moresby) sailed from Wellington on the 17th. The three ships duly met *Pensacola* and her convoy and all reached Brisbane on the 22nd.

⁸ *Bloemfontein*, *Coast Farmer*, *Meigs*, *Holbrook*, *Republic*, *Admiral Halstead*, *Chaumont*, and tender *Niagara*.

⁹ On *Perth's* return to Australia in Aug 1941, she went into dockyard hands for repairs and refit, and was under the command of Cdr Reid, RAN, from 1 Sep 1941 to 24 Oct 1941, on which date Capt Waller assumed command.

Cdr C. R. Reid, RAN. HMAS *Sydney* 1922; HMAS *Perth* 1939-42; CSO Darwin 1942-44; LO US Service Force, Seventh Fleet, 1944-45; SO to NOIC New Guinea 1945. Of Sydney; b. Hinnomunjie, Vic, 3 Sep 1904.

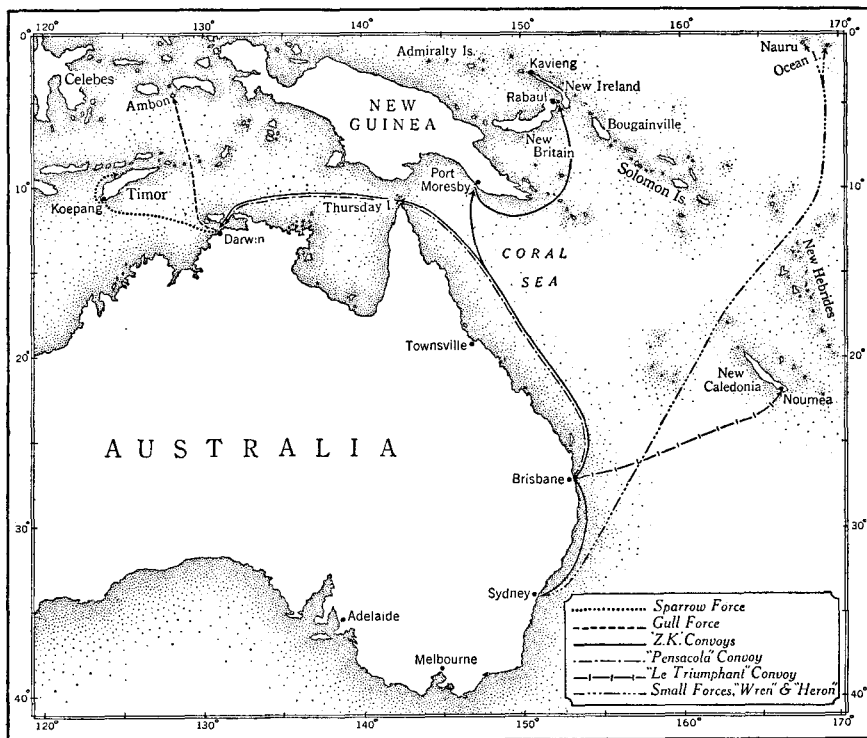
Later that day *Canberra*, *Perth* and *Achilles* sailed thence for Sydney. Other Allied ships were operating in the South Pacific at this time. H.M.N.Z.S. *Leander* spent most of December escorting New Zealand troop reinforcements to Suva. The Free French *Le Triomphant*, during the second half of the month, escorted the Australian coastal liner *Ormiston* (5,832 tons) to New Caledonia, carrying some 350 men of the 3rd Independent Company, A.I.F., 70 civilian road workers, and service cargo. The two ships left Brisbane on the 20th and reached Noumea on the 23rd. *Le Triomphant* was back in Brisbane on the 27th. It was intended that she should proceed to Singapore to join the Eastern Fleet, but at Layton's request was retained in the Eastern Australian area.

On the 24th December *Canberra*, *Perth* and *Achilles* entered Sydney Harbour. Three days earlier, H.M.A.S. *Australia* had reached the New South Wales base from the South Atlantic Station. *Australia* had spent 1941 mainly on patrol and convoy escort work, in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. She left Liverpool early in January 1941, as ocean escort of convoy WS.5B, for the Middle East via the Cape; entered the Indian Ocean in February; and on the 22nd of that month turned the convoy (then off Mombasa and bound north for the Gulf of Aden) over to H.M.S. *Hawkins*, while she herself joined in the hunt for the German raider *Scheer* which was in the area. After this fruitless search, *Australia* escorted *Mauretania* and *Nieuw Amsterdam* from Colombo towards Australia to form part of convoy US.10, and arrived in Sydney on the 24th March. April was spent escorting US.10, and at the end of the month she carried Admiral Colvin and staff from Singapore to Sydney after the Singapore Conference. June was spent escorting Tasman Sea convoys, and in mid-July she reached Trincomalee with convoy US.11A. For the rest of the year she was on escort and patrol duties on the South Atlantic Station, this period including a brief visit to Kerguelen to seek for possible German raiders. On the 14th August Captain Stewart, who had been in command since she was commissioned on the 28th August 1939, was succeeded by Captain Moore.¹ In December 1941, *Australia* was escorting convoy WS.12X between St Helena and Capetown when, on the 3rd of the month, she was ordered by the Admiralty to hand over to *Dorsetshire* and proceed towards Fremantle with dispatch. This was consequent upon the loss of *Sydney* and the threatening situation in the Far East. On the 24th December, in Sydney, Rear-Admiral Crace transferred his flag from *Canberra* to *Australia*, and also on that day Farncomb assumed command of the ship vice Moore, who went to *Canberra* in command.

At the end of the year 1941 Australian coastal waters were the scene of important convoy movements. On the 28th December U.S.S. *Houston*, flagship of the American Task Force 5, with destroyers *Whipple*, *Alden* and *Edsall* escorting the transport *Gold Star* (4,860 tons), the submarine tender *Otus* (6,750 tons), and the oiler *Pecos* (5,400 tons), reached

¹ Rear-Adm G. D. Moore, CBE; RAN. Joined RAN from *Conway* 1913. (HMS *Defence* 1914-16, HMAS *Melbourne* 1916-19.) Comd HMS *Dauntless* 1939-41, HMAS's *Australia* 1941, *Canberra* 1941-42; Second Naval Member 1942-44; FOIC NSW 1944-50; Aust Minister to Philippines, 1950-55. B. Springsure, Qld, 10 Oct 1893.

Darwin from Surabaya. That same morning convoy ZK.5 transports *Aquintania* (44,786 tons), *Sarpedon* (11,321 tons) and *Herstein* (5,100 tons)—carrying 4,250 Australian troops and 10,000 tons of equipment to reinforce Port Moresby—sailed from Sydney for the Papuan port escorted



by *Australia*, *Canberra*, *Perth*, and *Achilles*. Moving northwards up the coast some 300 miles ahead of them, U.S.S. *Pensacola*, with her convoy of seven ships, sailed from Brisbane at 8 p.m. on the 28th on their way to Torres Strait and Darwin. The activity foreshadowed the part the island continent was to play as one of the “two great nations through which men and material . . . could be moved into the fighting zone”.

CHAPTER 15

ABDA AND ANZAC

IN the second world war the democracies fought at an initial disadvantage, though possessing much greater resources than their enemies. Britain and the United States had embarked on accelerated rearmament programs in 1938, the naval projects including battleships and aircraft carriers; but this was a delayed start compared with that of Germany and Japan. Preparing for munitions production for total war, finding out what weapons to make, and their perfection into prototypes for mass production, takes in time upwards of two decades. After this preparation period, a mass production on a nation-wide scale is at least a four-years' task in which "the first year yields nothing; the second very little; the third a lot and the fourth a flood".¹ When Japan struck in December 1941, Britain and the British Commonwealth had been at war for more than two years. During that time they had to a large extent changed over to a war economy and increasingly brought reserve strength into play. Indeed, in 1940, 1941 and 1942, British production of aircraft, tanks, trucks, self-propelled guns and other materials of war, exceeded Germany's. This was partly due to Britain's wartime economic mobilisation, and partly to the fact that Germany had not planned for a long war. Having achieved easy victories by overwhelming unmobilised enemies with well-organised forces and accumulated stocks of munitions and materials, the Germans allowed overconfidence to prevent them from broadening the base of their economy to match the mounting economic mobilisation of Britain. Even so, owing to the initial handicap with which she had started, and such subsequent adversities as the fall of France, Britain had been able to do little more than stem the tide.

Japan's entry into the war found Britain weak in the South-West Pacific because of the effects and demands of war elsewhere. It found the United States weak in the South-West Pacific also because, as a democracy, the nation was not in peace as well prepared for war as was Japan, the military dictatorship.² The United States gained something in the two years after Britain and Germany went to war in 1939, largely because of apprehensions, shared by the President and some of his advisers, that American

¹ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. I (1948), p. 263, wherein Churchill stated: "In 1938-39 British military expenditure of all kinds reached £304 millions [1937-38 £234 millions; 1938-39 £304 millions; 1939-40 £367 millions], and German at least £1,500 millions." Japan's military budgets for the years 1938, 1939 and 1940 were: 6,097, 6,417, and 7,266 millions of yen respectively, exceeding Britain's military expenditures by some 70 per cent in the earliest instance and some 33 per cent in the two subsequent periods.

² For the eleven years 1929 to 1939 inclusive, the indices of industrial production for Japan and the United States (1929 equals 100) were:

Year	Japan	United States	Year	Japan	United States
1929	100.0	100.0	1935	140.6	79.1
1930	94.8	82.7	1936	150.2	93.6
1931	92.1	68.2	1937	168.9	102.7
1932	97.8	52.7	1938	174.7	80.0
1933	113.0	62.7	1939	182.5	98.2
1934	127.4	68.2			

J. B. Cohen, *Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction* (1949), p. 3.

security would be threatened by a German victory. These apprehensions, which increasingly influenced also American public opinion and Congress, enabled the Administration to go some way towards putting the country on a war footing, notably in the passing of the "two-ocean navy" Act in July 1940, and the *Selective Training and Service Act* in September—the first occasion that the United States adopted compulsory military training in time of peace. In addition, President Roosevelt adopted the political strategy of helping Britain in the struggle against Germany in every way possible "short of war", on the basis that for two years at least the Americas would be exceedingly vulnerable in the event of a German victory in Europe. For at least that period the United States would be vulnerable also in the Western Pacific if she was at war with Japan, and when Japan struck that period had not expired. Consequently Japan, like Germany, was able to gain easy initial victories. But, also like the Germans, the Japanese had not planned for a long war; and they looked to the forcible acquisition of raw materials as a substitute for broadening the base of their economy. They, too, were the victims of over-confidence induced by their early success, and allowed their wartime production to mark time while that of the United States shot ahead.³ Nevertheless, during the opening months of 1942 the Japanese continued to sweep ahead in the South-West Pacific. The energies of the Allies were bent towards stopping the flood.

II

Concurrent with the dispatch of Allied reinforcements to the Far East was a general reorganisation of command. On the American naval side, Pearl Harbour resulted in the replacement of Admiral Stark as Chief of Naval Operations, and Admiral Kimmel as Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet, by Admiral Ernest J. King⁴ and Admiral Chester Nimitz⁵ respectively. Nimitz assumed his command on 31st December 1941, on which date King became Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet. In March 1942 King assumed also the duties of Chief of Naval Operations. Stark then became Commander, United States Naval Forces in Europe.⁶ On the British side Vice-Admiral Somerville was, on 1st January 1942, appointed Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, to succeed Vice-Admiral Layton; and on the 3rd he left Gibraltar (where he had commanded

³ From 1939 to 1941 the total gross national product of Germany rose less than 4 per cent. From 1940 to 1942 that of Japan rose by little more than 2 per cent. (Cohen, p. 57.)

As an indication of America's effort under the stimulus of war, naval shipyard workers increased from 443,500 in Jan 1942 to 911,900 in Jan 1943; the average monthly production of destroyers rose from 1.33 in 1941 to 6.75 in 1942; navy enlisted men rose from 144,824 in 1940 to 556,477 in 1942; and pre-Pearl Harbour construction times were cut in the order of battleships from 39 to 32 months; aircraft carriers from 32 to 16 months; submarines from 14 to 7 months; and destroyers from 14 to just over 5 months. Admiral E. J. King, Official Report, *Our Navy at War*, 1944.

⁴ Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, US Navy. C-in-C Atlantic Fleet 1941, US Fleet 1941-42; Chief of Naval Operations 1942-45. B. Lorain, Ohio, USA, 23 Nov 1878. Died 25 Jun 1956.

⁵ Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, US Navy. Chief, Bureau of Navigation, 1939-41; C-in-C Pacific Fleet 1941-45; Chief of Naval Operations 1945-47. B. Fredericksburg, Texas, USA, 24 Feb 1885.

⁶ Admiral Kimmel was relieved of his command on the 17th December 1941. Vice-Admiral W. S. Pye, Commander, Battle Force, was appointed C-in-C, Pacific Fleet, pending the arrival of Nimitz at Pearl Harbour.

Force "H") for England to join the aircraft carrier *Formidable*. In Australia, after the arrival from the United States of the *Pensacola* convoy, and groups of ships at the end of 1941,⁷ an American military headquarters was set up in the Repatriation Building, St Kilda Road, Melbourne. General Brett was appointed in command of all United States Forces in Australia, with General Barnes and General Brereton (the first named as Chief of Staff) on his staff. On 3rd January 1942, at a conference between the United States generals and the Australian Chiefs of Staff, machinery to ensure close cooperation was worked out. Next day, however, it was announced in Washington that General Wavell had been appointed Supreme Commander in the South-West Pacific, with General Brett as Deputy Supreme Commander, and Admiral Hart in charge of Allied Naval Forces; and the Australian Government was told by cable of the detailed arrangements.

The Government had previously assented to Wavell's appointment, with the expressed expectation that Australia would be included in the composition of the "appropriate joint body" from which Wavell would receive his orders. The details now communicated, however, disclosed that arrangements for higher direction were that proposals from Wavell or any of the governments concerned in his command area would be submitted to a Chiefs of Staff Committee both in Washington and London. The London committee would telegraph its opinions to the Washington committee,⁸ which would develop and submit recommendations to the President and, by telegraph, to the British Prime Minister. The Prime Minister would then tell the President if he agreed with the recommendations. Agreement being reached, orders to Wavell would be sent from Washington in the names of President and Prime Minister. The British Government undertook to obtain the views and agreement of Dominion and Dutch Governments, and send them to Washington.

This arrangement did not provide for any direct consultation with Australia, whose Government therefore said it was unable to accept it. Early in December the Government had represented unsuccessfully to the United Kingdom Government its strong views that an inter-allied body should be established, preferably in the Pacific area. It now tried to secure the establishment in Washington of an inter-allied body for the higher direction of the war, again without success. Eventually, on 6th February 1942, the Government accepted a proposition made by Churchill on 19th January for the formation of a Far Eastern Council on the ministerial plane in London. The first meeting of this council, comprising two British

⁷ These groups of ships, carrying aircraft, aviation spirit, and vehicles, consisted of *Hawaiian Planter* (7,798 tons), *President Polk* (10,508), *James Lykes* (6,760), *Paul M. Gregg* (8,187), *Mormacsun* (4,996), and *Portmar* (5,551). They had originally included *Malama* (3,275 tons), but this vessel was sunk en route by the Japanese surface raiders *Aikoku Maru* and *Hokoku Maru* in mid-Pacific in the vicinity of the Tuamotu Archipelago.

⁸ The Washington committee was the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee, and consisted of the Chief of Staff to the President; the Chief of the US Staff; the Chief of US Naval Operations; the Commanding General of the US Army Air Forces; and high representatives of each of the British fighting services. The purpose of the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee was to ensure complete coordination of the war effort of Great Britain and the United States and to provide for full British and American collaboration with all the United Nations.

ministers, two Dutch, Sir Earle Page (Australia), Mr Jordan (New Zealand), Mr Amery (India and Burma), and the British Chiefs of Staff, was held on the 10th February under Mr Churchill's chairmanship. Its main function was "to review the broad fundamental policies to be followed in the war against Japan throughout the Pacific area". A similar council was set up in Washington under President Roosevelt, and the two bodies kept in close touch with each other.

The Australian Government disagreed also with the strategical approach as outlined in the directive to General Wavell. Therein the general strategic policy was given as:

- (a) to hold Malaya barrier defined as the line Malaya Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, North Australia, as the basic defensive position of the ABDA Area and to operate sea, land and air forces in as great depth as possible forward of this barrier in order to oppose a Japanese southward advance;
- (b) to hold Burma and Australia as essential support positions for the area and Burma as essential to the support of China and to the defence of India;
- (c) to re-establish communications through the Dutch East Indies with Luzon to support the Philippines garrison;
- (d) to maintain essential communications within the area.

In regard to (b), the Advisory War Council, at a meeting on 6th January, expressed the view that the strategical and supply aspects were intermingled. The Australian Government, as the result of recommendations by its Chiefs of Staff and General Brett, had approved a joint American-Australian organisation to enable the use of Australia as a base for American operations along the Malay Barrier and to maintain contact with the Philippines. Vital Australian centres would become obvious targets for Japanese attacks. But the definition of the ABDA (American-British-Dutch-Australian) Area excluded the whole of Australia. Australian waters were also excluded from the American naval zone in the Pacific. (Churchill's cable of 29th December 1941 outlining the agreement on unity of command stated that the U.S. navy would remain responsible for the whole of the Pacific east of the Philippines and Australia.)

Without adequate naval protection the line of communication to Australia for American supply ships cannot be maintained. The Japanese have only to walk into New Caledonia where they would be astride this line and in a position to launch air attacks on the most northern ports being used by the Americans for unloading aircraft and other supplies for transit to Darwin and the Netherlands East Indies.

Australian protests were met on both these points. On 7th January General Wavell reached Singapore from India, where he had been Commander-in-Chief since July 1941. He made such redistributions in Malaya as he considered most likely to solve the "time problem between rate of Japanese advance and the arrival of reinforcements", and to enable him to take steps to halt the Japanese southward advance by securing the line of naval and air bases from Darwin, through Timor, Java, and southern Sumatra to Singapore. On 10th January the appointment of Commander-in-Chief, Far East, was abolished, and General Pownall's

headquarters at Singapore were closed down; and that day, Wavell, taking Pownall with him as Chief of Staff, flew to Java and set up his headquarters at Lembang, ten miles north of Bandung and some sixty-five miles south-east of Batavia. Also on the 10th Wavell, in a telegram to the Australian Government, asked whether he was responsible for the defence of Darwin, a point not made clear in his directive. "Since this defence must depend on control of the Timor Sea which is in my area, it appears that Port Darwin is my responsibility, but should like confirmation." A recommendation by the Australian Chiefs of Staff that it should be his responsibility, and that the portion of Australia lying to the north of a line running from Onslow, Western Australia, to the south-east corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria, should be included in the ABDA Area was adopted by the War Cabinet; and on 24th January the Combined Chiefs of Staff, Washington, ordered the extension of the southern limit of the area to include Darwin and such portion of the north-west coast of Australia "as was necessary for successful defence against enemy landings, and for air operations from a base in that area".⁹

Wavell formally took over as Supreme Commander of ABDA (with the title *Abdacom*) on 15th January, on which date the naval branch of the command was constituted, its duties being to advise Wavell on all naval questions, and to exercise operational control over the Allied naval forces in the area. Its formation entailed some changes in naval command. On 1st January Admiral Hart arrived at Surabaya from the Philippines in the submarine *Shark*.¹ By then the first of a series of important reinforcement convoys was approaching Singapore. The British naval forces engaged on escort duty had been based on Singapore, but Vice-Admiral Layton now decided to shift their base and his headquarters to Java, the better to organise convoy escort. On 5th January he hoisted his flag in *Dragon*, and with *Durban* in company sailed with his staff to Batavia, where he arrived on the 6th. He took with him Rear-Admiral Palliser, whom he appointed Senior Naval Officer, Batavia, for convoy direction. Thereafter the convoy cruisers and destroyers were based on Tanjong Priok, the port of Batavia.

On 15th January Admiral Hart took charge of the naval branch of the ABDA organisation, with the title *Abdafloat*. He appointed Palliser his chief of staff and deputy commander. This new appointment necessitated a successor to Palliser in command of the convoy escort vessels, and Captain Collins, R.A.N., was appointed Commodore-in-Charge. Collins assumed his appointment on the 16th, and hoisted his broad pendant

⁹ As from 24 Jan 1942 the boundaries of ABDA were: On the north the boundary between India and Burma, thence east along Chinese boundary and coast to 30°N; along 30°N to 140°E (note Indo-China and Thailand excluded). On east by 140°E from 30°N to equator, then east to 141°E, then south to boundary between Dutch and British New Guinea; east along coast to 143°E, then south to coast of Australia. On the south by the north coast of Australia to the south-east corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria, thence by a line running direct across the continent to Onslow on the west coast; thence north-west to 15°S 92°E; on the west by 92°E.

¹ *Shark*, US submarine (1936), 1,315 tons, one 3-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 20 kts; sunk in Molucca Sea Feb 1942.

in the depot ship *Anking*² at Tanjong Priok. With the appointment of Hart as Abdafloat, the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, for the conduct of naval operations and strategy in the ABDA Area ceased; and on 16th January Vice-Admiral Layton (who remained Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, pending the arrival in the Indian Ocean of Vice-Admiral Somerville) transferred his flag from *Dragon* to *Emerald* (which had reached Singapore on the 13th escorting Convoy "DM.1") and sailed for Colombo. On the 16th the Admiralty defined the Eastern Fleet, then being formed, as comprising "all British battle-ships, aircraft carriers, minelayers, destroyers and submarines within the limits of the British East Indies and China Stations". This included the ships in the ABDA Area now under Collins. They were regarded as a detachment of the Eastern Fleet. First known as the "Far Eastern Squadron", this detachment's title was changed from 20th January to "China Force". Collins then assumed the title of Commodore Commanding China Force. On the 20th the force consisted of H.M. cruisers *Dragon*, *Durban*, and *Danae*; H.M. destroyers *Jupiter*, *Encounter*, *Express*, *Electra*, *Stronghold*, and H.M.A.S. *Vampire*; and the sloops H.M.I.S. *Jumna*³ and H.M.A.S. *Yarra*.

The ships of China Force met and took over incoming convoys from their ocean escorts just outside Sunda Strait, and escorted outgoing convoys to the open ocean, and there either dispersed them or handed them over to an ocean escort. The road from the Sunda Strait rendezvous to Singapore was of some 600 miles through the narrow waters of Sunda and Banka Straits, whence a choice of passages leads from the south-westwards through Berhala and Durian Straits into Singapore Strait via Selat Sinki (the deep channel approach to Singapore from Malacca Strait); or, eastward of the Lingga Archipelago to the north of Banka, through Rhio Strait into Singapore Strait from the south-eastward. It is a road with its own distinctive signposts, where "pulau" is an island; "selat" a channel or strait; "sungei" a river and "kuala" its mouth; and "tanjong" a cape or point of land. It is a road fringed with islands and beset by many reefs and shallows. In early 1942 hazards were increasing as the Japanese pressed southwards, and air attack (and the threat of surface attack) were added to the existing danger of submarine attack and the mine menace.

Anti-submarine and minesweeping duties employed the Australian corvettes of the 21st Auxiliary Minesweeping Group, whose numbers were added to in January with the arrival at Batavia on the 18th of *Ballarat* (Lieut-Commander Barling); *Wollongong* (Lieutenant Keith); and *Toowoomba* (Lieut-Commander Hirst);⁴ and during the last days of January they carried out extensive sweeping operations in Banka, Berhala, and

² *Anking* (1925), 3,472 tons, requisitioned from China Nav Co Ltd; sunk by Jap surface craft, S of Java, 4 Mar 1942.

³ HMIS *Jumna*, sloop (1941), 1,300 tons, six 4-in guns, 18 kts.

⁴ HMAS's *Wollongong* and *Toowoomba*, corvettes (1941), 733 tons, one 4-in gun, 16 kts.
Lt-Cdr G. A. Keith, RANVR. HMAS *Perth* 1940; comd HMAS's *Tambar* 1940-41, *Wollongong* 1941-43, *Reserve* 1943-44, *Ballarat* 1944, *Orara* 1945. Of Camberwell, Vic; b. Sydney, 20 Aug 1900.
Lt-Cdr P. H. Hirst, RAN. (HMS's *Royal Sovereign* 1917, *Dauntless* 1918.) Comd HMAS *Toowoomba* 1941-42; Capt Transportation Corps (Water Transport) AIF 1945-46. Of Carrick, Tas; b. Hobart, 27 Apr 1899.

Durian Straits. By this time Japanese aircraft were ranging well south, and the corvettes were under air attack on occasion, though without suffering damage or casualties.

In the exercise of the naval command of ABDA it was decided that normally naval forces in the area would operate under their own national commanders, effort being coordinated by directives issued by Abdafloat. When forces of mixed nationality were formed for any particular operation, Abdafloat would designate a commander. Thus Hart, while holding the Abdafloat appointment, continued in command of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet, with Purnell as his deputy at Surabaya and Glassford in command of Task Force 5; Helfrich continued as Commander-in-Chief of the Dutch forces, with Rear-Admiral Karel Doorman commanding afloat with his flag in *De Ruyter*; and Collins commanded China Force. General Wavell instructed that British and Dutch surface vessels were to be mainly employed in escorting convoys into Singapore; United States surface craft were to operate east of Borneo as a striking force if a suitable target could be found; and submarines were to be used for attack on the most likely enemy shipping routes in the area. Except that nominally there was now unity of command there was, in fact, little change from the previous situation.

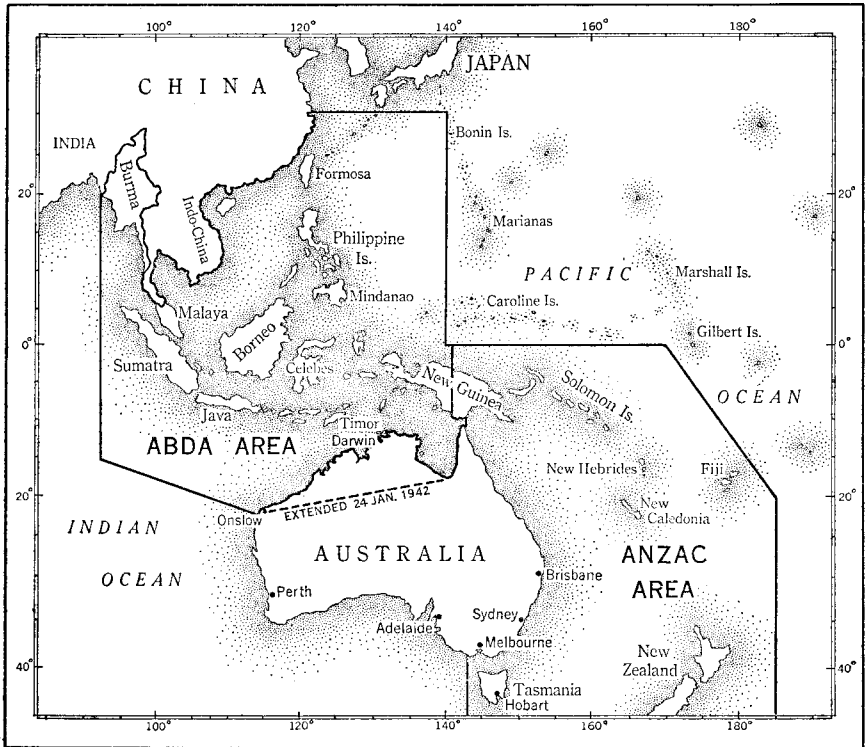
As to Australian protests regarding the exclusion of Australian waters from the American naval zone in the Pacific, Mr Churchill had earlier (3rd January) told Mr Curtin that the British view was that American naval responsibility should extend right up to the Australian coast.

Admiral King (he wrote) has only just been given full powers over the whole of the American Navy, and he has not yet accepted our views. Obviously, if I cannot persuade the Americans to take over we shall have to fill the gap as best we can, but I still hope our views will be accepted, in which case of course any vessels we or you will have in that area will come under United States direction while operating there.

The problem was finally resolved by acceptance of a proposal by King that a new area, to be known as "Anzac Area", should be set up, comprising approximately the north-eastern portion of the Australia Station. In this area an Allied naval force, "Anzac Force", would operate under the strategical direction of the Commander-in-Chief, United States Navy, exercised through one or more American flag officers assisted by one or more flag officers appointed by Australia and/or New Zealand. Accepted by the Australian Government on 27th January, this proposal was finalised in an agreement defining boundaries,⁵ forces and tasks. The initial assignment of ships to the area was: British, one aircraft carrier; United States, one heavy or one new light cruiser and two destroyers; New Zealand, two light cruisers and one armed merchant cruiser; Australia, two heavy cruisers (*Australia*, *Canberra*), one light cruiser (*Adelaide*), three armed

⁵ The original Anzac area boundaries were: beginning at longitude 141 degrees east at the equator, eastwards along the equator to longitude 170° east, thence south-east to a point in latitude 20° south, longitude 175° west, thence due south: from point of beginning south along meridian 141° east to south coast of New Guinea, thence eastwards along said coast to meridian 143° east, thence due south in sea areas only.

merchant cruisers (*Kanimbla*, *Westralia*, *Manoora*), two destroyers (*Stuart*, *Voyager*), two anti-submarine patrol vessels, and six 600-ton anti-submarine vessels—corvettes. The remainder of the Australian seagoing forces (*Hobart*, *Perth*, *Vampire*, *Vendetta*, *Yarra*, *Swan*, *Warrego*) were assigned to the ABDA command. Tasks assigned to the Anzac Force, in cooperation with air forces available in the area, were: to cover the eastern and



north-eastern approaches to Australia and New Zealand; protect shipping, including coastal; support the defence of islands in the area, and attack enemy island keypoints; and cooperate with forces in the ABDA Area and with the United States Pacific Fleet. Rear-Admiral H. F. Leary, U.S.N. (who, immediately prior to this had for a short while commanded the *Saratoga* carrier group in succession to Rear-Admiral Fletcher, appointed to command a new group formed on *Yorktown*), was appointed to command Anzac Force; and Rear-Admiral Crace, Rear-Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron, to command the Anzac Squadron afloat. Leary, who took up his appointment with the rank of vice-admiral on 7th February at Wellington, New Zealand, established his headquarters at Navy Office, Melbourne, on the 11th.

The original assignment of ships to the Anzac Area was not completely realised. The British aircraft carrier *Hermes* was allotted, but never served

there. A unit of the Eastern Fleet, she sailed from Colombo for Fremantle on 19th February to join Anzac Force, escorted by *Vampire*; but two days later both ships were recalled to Trincomalee. On 25th March the Admiralty regretted a further delay in sending her "as she has to take part in a special operation". Subsequently, after discussions between the Admiralty and Admirals Leary and Royle, it was agreed that she could be better employed with the Eastern Fleet, and should remain in the Indian Ocean.⁶ Only one Australian ship, the cruiser *Australia*, was in the Anzac Squadron at its formation. *Canberra* was undergoing an extensive refit. *Adelaide* was engaged on escort duties. The three armed merchant cruisers were also engaged on convoy escort work, but *Kanimbla* spent the last two weeks of February and the first week of March refitting in Sydney and *Manoora* operated in the ABDA Area and the Indian Ocean. The two destroyers would not be operational before the end of April. Available anti-submarine forces on the Australian coast amounted to only six corvettes⁷ and six converted merchant ships, "essential for protection of coastal shipping and keeping focal areas round important ports clear of submarines". The Anzac Squadron, as originally formed on 12th February 1942, at Suva, consisted of the heavy cruisers H.M.A.S. *Australia* (Flag) and U.S.S. *Chicago*; two light cruisers H.M.N.Z. Ships *Achilles* and *Leander*; and two destroyers, U.S. Ships *Perkins*⁸ and *Lamson*.⁹ During February and March Admiral Leary's command was strengthened by the addition of an American task force consisting of the aircraft carrier *Lexington*, the cruisers *Minneapolis*, *Indianapolis*, *Pensacola* and *San Francisco*, and ten destroyers, under Vice-Admiral Wilson Brown, U.S.N.

III

In the ABDA Area the Allies' immediate and vital problem was that already tackled locally by General Wavell in Malaya: to solve "the time problem between the rate of Japanese advance and the arrival of reinforcements". It was one which heightened the similarity between the situation in the South-West Pacific in early 1942 and that some twelve months earlier in the Eastern Mediterranean. In that earlier period the Mediterranean Fleet controlled the main sea, and also the Aegean until the overwhelming German air power made the waters north of Crete untenable and brought about the loss of that island. The main sea (and the Aegean until

⁶ The Australian Prime Minister was not told of this decision until after *Hermes* was lost to Japanese air attack in the Bay of Bengal on 9 Apr 1942. At a meeting of the Advisory War Council on 16 Apr he asked Royle why she had not gone to the Anzac area and, on being told, commented: "that as the Australian Government had allotted units to Anzac Force on the basis of joint contribution, this change should have been reported."

⁷ At 1 Feb 1942 there were in commission 20 Australian-built corvettes classified as HMA Ships, Australian manned. Of these, nine were manned on Admiralty account. Two of them, *Bathurst* and *Lismore*, were with the Eastern Fleet; and seven, *Maryborough*, *Goulburn*, *Burnie*, *Bendigo*, *Ballarat*, *Wollongong* and *Toowoomba*, were in the ABDA area. Of the balance of the 20, four, *Deloraine*, *Lithgow*, *Katoomba* and *Warrnambool*, were in the Darwin area; two *Townsville* and *Mildura*, were on escort duties on the east coast of Australia; and five, *Colac*, *Whyalla*, *Geelong*, *Rockhampton* and *Cessnock*, did not commission until during January 1942, and were working up.

⁸ *Perkins*, US destroyer (1936), 1,465 tons, four 5-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 36.5 kts; sunk by collision off N coast of New Guinea 29 Nov 1943.

⁹ *Lamson*, US destroyer (1937), 1,480 tons, four 5-in guns, twelve 21-in torp tubes, 36.5 kts.

the closing stages) was a busy communications area, with east-west convoys to and from Malta, and the north-south convoys hastening reinforcements to Greece and Crete in an endeavour to solve the time problem between their arrival and the rate of German advance; with the Mediterranean Fleet affording escort and both close and distant cover. In the opening months of 1942 the Indian Ocean, and the Sunda Strait and Java Sea, with the approaches to Singapore, were similarly highways for the passage of convoys, until the overwhelming Japanese sea power, both on the surface and in the air, made the waters north of Java untenable for the Allies.

The similarity extended to the heavy calls made on available Allied naval strength for the provision of cover and escort for the convoys, but the situation in the Indian Ocean and South-West Pacific in 1942 was more acute because of the lack (until March) of a British battle squadron in the Indian Ocean, and, when it did arrive, because of its inferiority in size, speed and strength, to the powerful Japanese battle fleet which, supported by mounting preponderance in the air, increasingly dominated the seas north of Java, and extended its influence southwards. Throughout January, February, and March, the continuous stream of large and important British military convoys—the “WS” convoys round the Cape to the Middle East; the “BM” convoys from Bombay and “DM” from Durban to Malaya; the “MS” convoys from Melbourne to the ABDA Area; the “SR” and “MR” convoys from Calcutta and Madras to Rangoon; and the “JS” and “SU”¹ convoys carrying the A.I.F. from the Middle East to Australia—employed almost the entire British naval strength in the Indian Ocean, and the British and Dutch in the ABDA Area, in the provision of escorts.

Until shortly before Singapore fell (recorded the East Indies Station war diary for February 1942) the main task of HM Ships on this station was the escorting of the convoys taking reinforcements of men and materials there. Subsequently more convoys continued to be escorted through the station, with troops and war materials destined for Java, Rangoon and Australia. The demand for ocean escorts was therefore very heavy throughout the month and it was only possible to give ships the minimum time in harbour between one convoy and the next.

Battleships, when they became available, were also used for escort work, and the same diary for March recorded that when the 3rd Battle Squadron arrived on the station that month, the ships “carried out individual practice periods between their utilisation as ocean escorts”.

Manoora was the first Australian ship to take part as ocean escort in this convoy period, sailing from Calcutta on 14th December 1941 with a convoy for Rangoon. Thereafter, during January and early February she escorted four SR convoys from Calcutta to Rangoon, and two MR convoys from Madras to the Burmese port. By the end of the month Japanese

¹ These were merely code initials to distinguish convoys, and did not always carry a definite reference to terminal ports, though sometimes they did. In the above, “BM” and “DM” clearly indicated departure and arrival points, as did “MS” and “SR” (Sandheads-Calcutta to Rangoon) and “MR”. “JS” was apparently an arbitrary choice, and “SU” was “US” (Australia to Middle East) in reverse.

submarines were active both in the Bay of Bengal and south of the Malay barrier. *Manoora* listed seven ships as attacked between the 21st and 31st January. Four ships, *Nord*, *Chak Sang*, *Jalatarang* and *Jalapalaka*,² were sunk. The enemy did not have it all his own way, and on 17th January submarine *I 160*,³ first Japanese submarine to be sunk by a British warship, was sunk off the western entrance to Sunda Strait by the destroyer *Jupiter*. *Jupiter* was detached from the screen of the American transport *Mount Vernon* (which had arrived at Singapore with reinforcements on 13th January in convoy "DM.1") in response to a distress message from a merchant ship, and sank the submarine after a two-hour asdic hunt followed by a surface duel with guns and torpedoes.

Vampire was next in the escort field. Back at Singapore on 10th December after the loss of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, she covered a mine-laying operation off Kuantan, and on 19th December, in company with *Dragon* and *Durban*, left Singapore escorting S.S. *Erinpura* (5,143 tons) with survivors from the two capital ships, towards Colombo. The three escort vessels returned to Padang, Sumatra, on the 25th December, left there three days later, and on the 29th met *Hobart*, escorting convoy "BM.9A" to Singapore, and augmented the escort through Sunda Strait. *Vampire* remained on escort duties in the ABDA Area until her final departure therefrom early in February.

Hobart, returning to Australia from the Mediterranean, had taken over the ocean escort of convoy "BM.9A" from H.M.S. *Glasgow* off Colombo on 24th December. It was intended that she should turn over to *Dragon*, *Durban*, and *Vampire* off Sumatra, and herself continue on to Australia; but she was instructed to continue on to Singapore. The convoy entered Sunda Strait at dawn on the 1st January 1942, and reached Singapore on the 3rd, where *Hobart* had her first taste of Japanese air attack in a raid on the naval base. She gave a hand in escorting the next incoming convoy ("BM.9B") into Singapore, and on the 7th called at Tanjong Priok for fuel and provisions on her way to Fremantle, where she arrived on the 11th.

On 10th January the first MS convoy—"MS.1"—sailed from Melbourne. It carried motor transport and other equipment for Australian troops who themselves travelled to Malaya in convoy "MS.2". In December the Australian Government had offered to send a machine-gun battalion; 400 tank troops; and 1,800 reinforcements for the 8th Division, to Malaya. This offer (with the exception of that of the armoured troops) was "gratefully accepted" by the British Government, and on 10th January convoys "MS.1" and "MS.2" sailed from Melbourne and Sydney respectively.

Convoy "MS.1" was of three ships for Singapore and four for the Netherlands East Indies ports. The escort to Fremantle was *Kanimbla*, which had been in Melbourne since her arrival there from Singapore on 25th December. She left Melbourne at 1 p.m. on Saturday, 10th January.

² Of 3,193, 2,358, 2,498 and 4,215 tons respectively.

³ *I 160*, Japanese submarine (1929), 1,635 tons, one 4.7-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 19 kts.

It is considered to be worthy of remark (wrote her commanding officer, Captain Adams) that when *Kanimbla* sailed at 1300 on a Saturday in Melbourne, one hour after interrupted foreign service leave in one watch expired, only four ratings were absent over leave out of a ship's company of over 300 officers and men.

At Fremantle, "MS.1" was enlarged by three more ships (and a couple of days later by a fourth from Geraldton) and *Hobart* strengthened the escort. The convoy arrived off the entrance to Sunda Strait on 28th January. There *Tenedos* and *Stronghold* joined the escort, and *Kanimbla* detached and returned to Fremantle. The Singapore portion of the convoy (now of five ships) reached there safely on the 1st February.⁴ *Kanimbla* arrived at Fremantle on the 3rd, and on the 14th reached Sydney, where she underwent refit. She took no further part in the ABDA Area operations.

There was only one ship—*Aquitania*—in convoy "MS.2", escorted by H.M.A.S. *Canberra*. Japan's entry into the war interrupted the series of "US"—A.I.F.—convoys to the Middle East and Malaya. "US.13" was the last "US" convoy to leave Australia in 1941, but transports were returning to Australia for inclusion in 1942 "US" convoys. *Aquitania*, which had been one of "US.12B" to the Middle East, arrived back in Sydney on 28th November, and was there when the Far Eastern war broke out. *Queen Elizabeth*, returning from the Middle East, where she had gone in "US.13" in November, reached Sydney on 15th December. It will be recalled that at the end of December *Aquitania* formed part of convoy "ZK.5", carrying reinforcements from Sydney to Port Moresby. She was back in Sydney on 8th January, by which time arrangements had been made for her to carry troops to Malaya. The original proposal, put forward by the Naval Board, was that she should go to Singapore, but Admiral Layton, concerned at putting her within striking distance of Japanese aircraft, suggested the use of smaller ships. *Aquitania* was, however, the only suitable ship available in Australia. It was eventually decided to use her, but to trans-ship her troops at Ratai Bay, Sunda Strait, into smaller vessels which the Dutch provided, thus keeping her outside the range of Japanese aircraft. Escorted by *Canberra*, and carrying 3,456, including 78 navy, 105 air force and 76 civilians, she left Sydney on 10th January and reached Ratai Bay on the 20th. There, under cover of an Allied naval force, her troops were trans-shipped to seven small vessels⁵ and carried on to Singapore (reached on 24th January) in convoy "MS.2A", escorted by *Canberra*; *Vampire*; H.M.S. *Thanet*; H.M.I.S. *Jumna*; and the Dutch cruiser *Java*. *Aquitania* was back in Sydney on 31st January. *Canberra*, which had detached from "MS.2A" north of Banka Strait on the 23rd, returned via Tanjong Priok to Fremantle, where she

⁴ Ships in "MS.1" were: for Singapore—*City of Manchester* (8,917 tons); *Phrontis* (6,181); *Pan Europe* (9,468); *Derrymore* (4,799); *Gorgon* (3,533). For NEI ports—*Tjikarang* (9,505); *Peisander* (6,225); *Enggano* (5,412); *Java* (7,500); *Tjikandi* (7,970); and *War Sirdar* (5,542).

⁵ The naval covering force at Ratai Bay comprised the Australian ships *Canberra* and *Vampire*; the British *Dragon* and *Express*; the American *Stewart*, *Barker* and *Isabel*; the Indian *Jumna*; and the Dutch *Van Nes* and *Soemba*. Transports in convoy MS.2A were the Dutch KPM vessels *Both* (2,601 tons); *Reijnst* (2,462); *Van der Lijn* (2,464); *Sloet van de Beele* (2,977); *Van Swoll* (2,147); and *Reael* (2,561); and the British *Talshan* (3,174).

arrived on 29th January. It was undesirable to retain the big transports in an area where they could not be used to advantage, and on 7th February *Queen Elizabeth* sailed from Sydney for Canada via New Zealand, and reached Esquimault on the 24th of the month. *Aquitania* departed Sydney for Honolulu on 10th February.

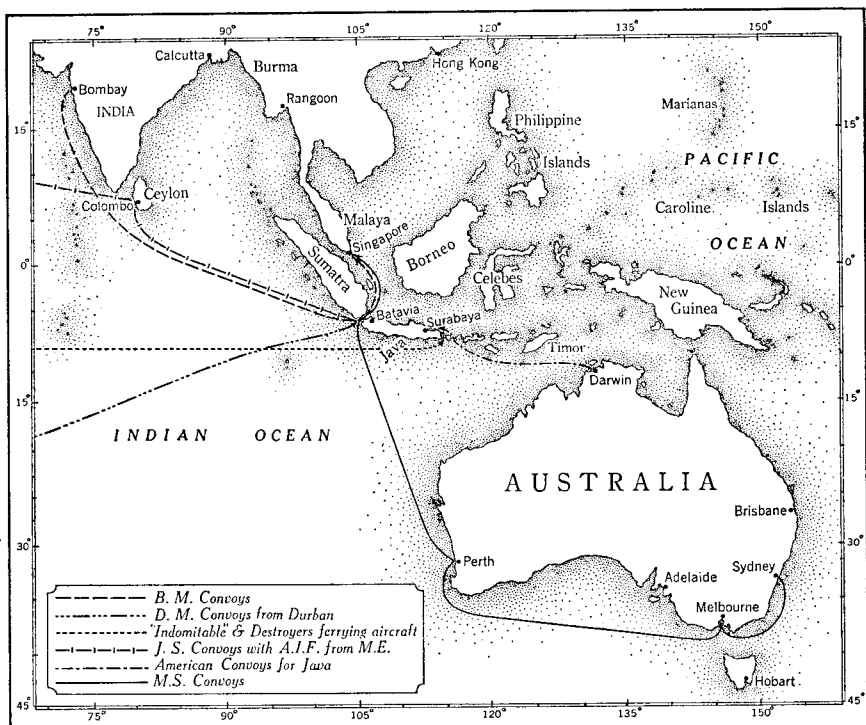
Three more "MS" convoys sailed from Australia, but hurrying events dictated that only one should reach the ABDA Area. With the Japanese rapidly pushing down to the remaining oil ports in the Netherlands East Indies, endeavours were made to get as many oil cargoes out as possible, and on the 30th January convoy "MS.3", of seven tankers for Palembang and four cargo ships for Batavia, sailed from Fremantle escorted by *Canberra*. In the vicinity of Christmas Island, on 6th February, the convoy met *Dragon*, *Durban*, and two destroyers escorting *Warwick Castle* (20,107 tons) from Singapore, and escorts changed over. *Canberra* returned to Fremantle where she arrived on 10th February with *Warwick Castle*, while *Dragon* and her consorts escorted "MS.3" through Sunda Strait, north of which the convoy split into two sections each of which safely reached its destination.⁶ From Fremantle *Canberra* proceeded to Sydney, where she arrived on 17th February for refit, thus ending her activities in the ABDA Area.

Meanwhile aircraft reinforcements, of which the most urgent need was fighters, were hurried to the ABDA Area. Some few aircraft were flown in December from Australia and the Middle East to Malaya; but early in that month the Japanese occupied the airfield at Victoria Point, southern Burma (on the Kra Isthmus) and thus denied to the British the air reinforcement route along the west coast of Malaya. The stages on the alternative route, via Sabang off northern Sumatra, were too long for fighters, which henceforward had to be sent by sea. Fifty-one Hurricanes were carried from Durban in convoy "DM.1"; forty more were embarked at the western terminus of the air reinforcement route, Takoradi, in H.M.S. *Athene* (4,681 tons), which reached Batavia via the Cape on 6th February; and another forty-eight were embarked, with their pilots, in H.M.S. *Indomitable* at Port Sudan for transportation to ABDA. *Indomitable* was escorted by the three Australian destroyers of the 7th Flotilla—*Napier*, *Nizam*, and *Nestor*. In December the aircraft carrier was en route to the Indian Ocean, and reached Durban (whence she was ordered to Port Sudan) on the 31st. The three destroyers left Alexandria on 3rd January, on the 9th met *Indomitable* off Guardafui and, on the 14th, the four ships reached Port Sudan whence they sailed, with the aircraft embarked in *Indomitable*, next day. On the 21st they reached Addu Atoll;⁷ four days later, in the vicinity of Cocos Island, the destroyers

⁶ Ships in "MS.3" were: tankers for Palembang—*Marpessa* (7,408 tons); *Erling Brøvig* (9,970); *Seistrad* (9,916); *Manvantara* (8,237); *Merula* (8,228); *Elsa* (5,381); and *Herborg* (7,892). Cargo vessels for Tanjong Priok—*Marella* (7,475); *Mangola* (3,352); *Antilochus* (9,082); and *Charon* (3,703).

⁷ Addu Atoll, a ring of coral islands surrounding a deepwater lagoon at the southern end of the Maldiv Islands, supplied a secret and secluded fleet anchorage in the Indian Ocean as an alternative to Colombo, from which it lay south-west some 600 miles. With tankers, store ships, hospital ships, an airfield and flying-boat base, it had considerable value in Indian Ocean strategy in the period of British weakness there.

fuelled from the carrier. On 27th and 28th January, from a position south of Java, *Indomitable* flew off the aircraft. The force reached Trincomalee on 2nd February.



Reinforcement of ABDA

Meanwhile the possibility of withdrawal of British forces from Singapore in favour of the reinforcement of Burma had been considered by the British Government. It will be recalled that the general strategic policy as given in the directive to General Wavell as Abdacom included: "to hold Malaya Barrier defined as the line Malaya Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, North Australia as the basic defensive position of the ABDA Area", and "to hold Burma and Australia as essential support positions for the area and Burma as essential to the support of China and to the defence of India". But at this stage the Japanese had secured much of the Malaya Peninsula, while the rest of it, with Sumatra and Burma, faced dire threats. As with Malaya, the threat to Burma had developed with unexpected speed. From 5th January Rangoon was under air attack, and on the 16th January the invasion of Lower Burma from Siam began with an attack on Tavoy, which the Japanese entered on the 19th. On the 22nd the General Officer Commanding, Burma, reported that he could not guarantee the safety of the country with the forces available. This gloomy picture coincided with one of Malaya and Singapore in which

Wavell hinted at the possibility of the loss of Malaya, and told Churchill: "I doubt whether island [Singapore] can be held for long once Johore is lost." Reinforcements, including part of the 18th British Division (part had already landed) and an Indian brigade, were in the Indian Ocean on the way to Singapore, but it was beyond British resources to reinforce both threatened areas; and it was on this day, the 22nd January, that Sir Earle Page, who was in London as Special Representative of the Australian Government, cabled to that Government that the British Defence Committee had been considering the abandonment of Malaya and Singapore, and concentration on the defence of Burma and keeping open the Burma Road to China.

For nearly twenty years, as a result of acceptance of British views and assurances regarding the vital role of Singapore in a Far Eastern War, the naval base there and the fleet to be based thereon had been the keystone of Australian defence plans. And when, from time to time, as a result of disquieting suggestions, Australian doubts had been expressed as to the security of Singapore, these had been soothed by British reassurance both as to Singapore's ability to resist attack, and British ability to send there a fleet capable of securing control of the adjacent seas. It was on the acceptance of these assurances and reassurances that Australia had a division of troops in Malaya. An immediate and strong protest by the Australian Government against any proposed withdrawal was therefore not unnatural, and this was sent by Mr Curtin to Mr Churchill on 23rd January, and was concurred in by the Australian Chiefs of Staff. Australian views on the question had not been sought. In London Sir Earle Page had not been consulted, but "by some means or other"⁸ had been shown a copy of a minute on the subject sent by Churchill to the British Chiefs of Staff. Subsequently Mr Churchill wrote: "It is not true to say that Mr Curtin's message decided the issue"; but that there was "a hardening of opinion against the abandonment of this renowned key point in the Far East". As in Greece, and as was to happen again in the Netherlands East Indies, considerations other than military influenced the decision. But Mr Churchill was beyond question right when he said: "There is no doubt what a purely military decision should have been." As it was, the convoys carrying the reinforcements were not diverted to Rangoon (as had been envisaged as a possibility by Mr Churchill) but continued on to Singapore, where the last, "BM.12", arrived on 5th February.

This convoy, "BM.12", brought another Australian ship well into the ABDA picture. She was H.M.A.S. *Yarra*, which spent much of January and February escorting in the area and its approaches. She sailed from Alexandria on 16th December 1941, was at Colombo on the 30th, and on 11th January reached Tanjong Priok. On the 15th she was allotted to the Far Eastern Squadron (shortly to become China Force) and at once entered on escort work. On 3rd February Convoy "BM.12": *Devonshire*

⁸ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. IV (1951), p. 50.

(11,100 tons); *Empress of Asia* (16,909); *Felix Roussel* (17,083); *City of Canterbury* (8,331); and *Plancius* (5,955) for Singapore; and Convoy "DM.2": *Warwick Castle*; *City of Pretoria* (8,049); *Malancha* (8,124); and *Dunera* for Batavia; all ships loaded with troops and military equipment, were negotiating Sunda Strait escorted by *Exeter*; *Danae*; *Sutlej*;⁹ *Jupiter*; *Java*; *Vampire* and *Yarra*. The convoys parted for their respective destinations after clearing Sunda Strait. During the forenoon of the 4th the Singapore portion, escorted by *Danae*, *Sutlej* and *Yarra*, was bombed in Banka Strait, but suffered only minor damage from near-misses. "This attack," wrote Harrington, *Yarra's* commanding officer, "was not in my opinion pressed home with determination equal to that shown by German or even Italian aircraft, and bombs were jettisoned clear of any target." Next day, however, the Japanese were more successful.

On 5th February only two of the corvettes of the 21st Minesweeping Group, *Bendigo* and *Wollongong*, were at Singapore. The rest had left for operations in Java and southern Sumatra. *Bendigo* had been for six days at anchor in Singapore Roads. It was a trying time in which "the inactivity on board coupled with the monotonous regularity of enemy bombers had a most depressing effect on morale. From 1st to 6th February there were 25 alerts, and the enemy were over two or three times daily."¹

Hitherto, since Japan entered the war, no convoy had entered Singapore during daylight hours; but "BM.12", in two groups, arrived in the forenoon of 5th February. *Sutlej*, with the leading group, *Devonshire* and *Plancius*, was at the eastern end of Selat Sinki when, looking westwards at 11.15 a.m., a large column of smoke was seen behind the western end of Pulau Bukum (the southern side of the eastern entrance to Selat Sinki). A few minutes later anti-aircraft smoke bursts were seen south of Sultan Shoal lighthouse on the northern edge of Selat Sinki's western entrance, and *Empress of Asia* came into sight closing Sultan Shoal.

She was (*Sutlej* recorded) on fire from bridge to mainmast and steaming at slow speed, sheering first to port and then to starboard . . . and *Yarra* was sighted in the direction of Sultan Shoal engaging enemy aircraft. . . . At 11.35 *City of Canterbury* was sighted. Both she and *Felix Roussel* were being attacked by enemy dive bombers. . . . I am of the opinion that *Felix Roussel* and *City of Canterbury* were only saved from the fate of *Empress of Asia* by the skilful handling and determined defence of their ships coupled with the effective gun fire of HMAS *Yarra*. It is possible that the fire of HMIS *Sutlej* did have a deterrent effect on the enemy dive bombers which were attacking these ships.²

The three transports of the second group, escorted by *Yarra* and *Danae*, were turning in to the western end of Selat Sinki when Japanese aircraft struck in a series of dive-bombing and machine-gunning attacks. *Felix Roussel* and *Empress of Asia* were both hit and set on fire. The first-named extinguished her fire promptly, but *Empress of Asia* was soon blazing fiercely amidships, and anchored off Sultan Shoal with her people crowded at either end of the ship. *Yarra*, only superficially damaged though

⁹ HMIS *Sutlej*, sloop (1941), 1,300 tons, six 4-in guns, 18 kts.

¹ *Bendigo* "Letter of Proceedings".

² Report of HMIS *Sutlej*.

dive-bombed and machine-gunned, shot down one aircraft for certain with two probables; and while the attack was still in progress, Harrington laid her bow alongside *Empress of Asia's* stern (being determined to keep his propellers clear) and, lowering floats and boats and rafts, did a fine rescue job. In all, *Yarra* lifted 1,804 from the doomed transport, embarking 1,334 directly from the liner, and picking up 470 in boats and floats. Not until no one remained in the after part of *Empress of Asia* (which was completely isolated from the fore part by the midships fire) did Harrington cast off, and by then, though as many as possible of those rescued had been sent below and all stores, cabins, and lower deck compartments were filled to capacity, "I was becoming a little dubious of the stability of H.M.A.S. *Yarra*, and on getting clear gave orders for all hands to sit". Meanwhile *Bendigo* and *Wollongong* also took a hand. *Bendigo* rescued seventy-eight, while *Wollongong* "went alongside *Empress of Asia* and took off the last survivors, the Master and Chief Engineer, from the bow".³

Harrington, while observing in his report that "my officers and men performed their various tasks with that coordination and cooperation which they are accustomed to show in unforeseen circumstances", singled out Acting Leading Seaman Taylor,⁴ who, "the captain of No. 2 gun, deserves commendation in that, on this occasion, as on many others, he controlled his gun with judgment and determination. This rating's keenness and courage are a good example to all those in his vicinity."

Convoy "BM.12" was the last into Singapore. During the night of the 30th-31st January the British withdrew from Malaya on to Singapore Island in the face of the advancing Japanese, and breached the causeway. By that date the line of Japanese advance ran from the southern tip of Malaya across to Borneo where the enemy had reached as far south as Balikpapan on the east coast; thence to Kendari at the south-east corner of Celebes; across the Banda Sea to Ambon; whence it arched eastwards, embracing the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago, to a new anchorage at Rabaul. In the race between the arrival of reinforcements and the Japanese advance, the enemy was forging ahead.

IV

The initial Japanese assault on Borneo was by Vice-Admiral Ozawa's western naval force from Camranh Bay in mid-December 1941. Early in January Vice-Admiral Takahashi's eastern force, having completed naval operations in the Philippines, moved against the Netherlands East Indies in simultaneous operations through the Macassar Strait and Molucca Sea, for which purpose ships and aircraft assigned to the *Third Fleet* were divided into a western and eastern invasion force, supported respectively by the *23rd and 21st Air Flotillas* which moved into position during the first week in January, the first-named at Jolo, and the second at Davao.

³ Report of HMIS *Sutlej*.

⁴ Ldg-Seaman R. Taylor, 20863, RAN. HMAS *Yarra* 1939-41. B. Carlton, Vic, 29 Apr 1918. Lost in sinking of *Yarra*, 4 Mar 1942.

Surface forces assembled in Davao Bay where, on 4th January, the heavy cruiser *Myoko* was damaged in an Allied air attack and had to go to Sasebo for repairs. Distant cover for the entire operation was provided by Vice-Admiral Kondo's main force of *Atago*, *Takao*, *Kongo* and destroyers under his direct command, and the *East Support Unit*, *Haruna*, *Maya*, and destroyers, which two groups operated east of Palau and east of Mindanao respectively; and overall support was given by Rear-Admiral Takagi in *Nachi*, with *Haguro*, *Myoko*,⁵ and two destroyers operating north of Menado. In conjunction with these operations the submarines of the 28th, 29th and 30th Divisions were deployed in northern Australian waters on reconnaissance, to attack lines of communication, and to mine Dundas and Torres Straits.

The first surface group to move was that of the western invasion force for Tarakan in Borneo. Of sixteen transports carrying the 56th Regimental Group and the 2nd Kure Special Naval Landing Force, it left Davao on 7th January. Naval escort was by Rear-Admiral Nishimura in *Naka* with eleven destroyers, and small vessels; with the seaplane tenders *Sanyo Maru* and *Sanuki Maru* to provide anti-submarine defence. Air cover was given by the 23rd Air Flotilla. Rear-Admiral Hirose's 2nd Base Force cooperated at the landings, screening the landing forces and clearing the approaches. The convoy suffered only one attack en route—by three American heavy bombers—and sustained no damage. On the evening of 10th January the convoy anchored some ten miles east of Tarakan Island, the heavy smoke from which indicated that the Dutch defenders had fired the oil fields. Landing craft set off about midnight, and by dawn on the 11th landings had been made on the north and south coasts. The next morning the overwhelmed, small Dutch garrison surrendered. On the 16th aircraft of the 23rd Air Flotilla were able to use the airfield, and by 25th January the flotilla's headquarters were established on the island.

Simultaneously the eastern invasion force launched an assault on Menado, on the northern tip of Celebes. It included, for the first time by the Japanese, an attack by naval paratroops. The surface force of six transports carrying the *Sasebo Combined Special Naval Landing Force* left Davao on 9th January escorted by Rear-Admiral Tanaka in *Jintsu* with ten destroyers, and smaller vessels; and with *Chitose* and *Mizuho* of Rear-Admiral Fujita's 11th Seaplane Tender Division to provide anti-submarine defence. These two ships left Davao with the convoy and went to Bangka Island harbour (one of the Sangi Islands, just to the north of Menado) on the 11th. The 21st Air Flotilla gave air cover. *Nagara*, and other units of Rear-Admiral Kubo's 1st Base Force cooperated in the actual landing operations. The convoy was sighted by an American Catalina flying-boat in the afternoon of the 10th when about 180 miles north of Menado,⁶ and Allied aircraft from Ambon and Buru attacked it after

⁵ Japanese accounts, though including *Myoko* in Takagi's force at this time as part of the 5th Cruiser Squadron, also state that she had to go to Sasebo for repairs after being damaged on 4 Jan.

⁶ The Catalina's report gave the convoy as consisting of "one heavy cruiser, eight light cruisers, 15 destroyers, 12 transports, and three submarines".

it anchored, but without success. Before dawn on the 11th, landings were made successfully at the Menado beaches, and also at those at Kema on the opposite side of the peninsula. Meanwhile, early in the morning of the 11th, 334 men of the *First Paratroop Force of 1st Yokosuka Special Landing Force* left Davao in twenty-eight transport aircraft and began dropping on Langoan airfield, just south of Menado, shortly before 10 a.m. As an essay in this form of warfare the operation left much to be desired from the Japanese viewpoint. The aircraft were too high when the drops were made, and a strong wind scattered the parachutists and separated them from their equipment. However the attack caused confusion among the defenders, and the Japanese secured the airfield before noon. Next day another 185 paratroops landed on Langoan airfield, occupied the town of Langoan, and linked up with the seaborne invaders during the afternoon of the 12th, by which day the whole of the Menado area was occupied. The Japanese thus gained control of the northern approaches to the Strait of Macassar and the Molucca Passage, and extended their own aircraft range southward while preventing air reinforcement of the Philippines with other than long-range bombers. By 24th January Langoan airfield was fully operative, and occupied by the *21st Air Flotilla*, and the Japanese had "succeeded in driving a wedge deep into the eastern part of the Dutch East Indies".⁷

That the Japanese progress was able to proceed so smoothly was in part due to the failure of the Allies to implement the policy decided upon at the Singapore conference in February 1941, and confirmed at subsequent conferences, including that in December 1941, that naval and air forces should be used to forestall the establishment of enemy naval and air bases within striking distance of vital points.⁸ At this stage there was still no central Allied naval command. Emphasis in the use of naval forces continued to be on escort of convoy, contrary to the general agreement at the December conference that the strongest possible striking forces should be maintained—of British and Dutch in the west, and of Task Force 5 and local Dutch forces in the Celebes Sea and Macassar Strait area. At the time of the Tarakan and Menado invasions the British and Dutch surface forces were mainly employed in the escort of Singapore convoys; and Task Force 5 was in northern Australian waters. *Houston*, with *Alden*, *Edsall* and *Whipple*, was in Darwin; and on 9th January the two other cruisers of the Task Force, *Boise* (flag of Rear-Admiral Glassford) and *Marblehead*, with the five destroyers *Stewart*, *Bulmer*, *Pope*, *Parrott*, and *Barker*, left Darwin escorting the transport *Bloemfontein* (10,081 tons) to Surabaya.

⁷ Japanese document, ATIS translation "AL.1096", 1948, "Invasion of the Dutch East Indies".

⁸ In an "Appreciation on Japanese Strategy" issued on 8 Feb 1942, the Director of COIC remarked: "The Japanese advance has been maintained and their success in all these operations has been due in the main to numerical superiority but their careful and successfully planned operations have never been seriously interrupted. Their advanced positions now extend in a semicircle from Thailand to New Britain behind which is a network of major, secondary and advanced operational bases—military, naval, and air. In the case of aerial operations this extensive network permits of a rapid transfer of aircraft from one sphere of activity to another. Further, they have achieved a position which is the inner arc of a circle of attack, while our weaker, defending forces now hold only the longer and more difficult system of aerial communications."

On hearing of the Japanese assaults, however, Admiral Hart (who had taken responsibility for the flank east of Bali, while the British were responsible for the western flank and the Dutch for the centre) planned a strike by Task Force 5 on the Japanese convoy at Kema, and on 12th January *Houston*, *Alden*, *Edsall* and *Whipple* sailed from Darwin to rendezvous with Glassford in the Banda Sea. But on the 17th, when it was learned that the Japanese ships were no longer at Kema, the operation was cancelled. Glassford in *Boise*, with *Marblehead*, and the destroyers *John D. Ford*, *Pope*, *Parrott* and *Paul Jones*, retired to Koepang Bay, Timor, to refuel. *Houston*, with *Edsall*, *Whipple* and *John D. Edwards*, went to Thursday Island to escort an American ship to Darwin. On the way *Houston* reported two Japanese submarines in a position approximately 180 miles north-west of Darwin, and left *Edsall* searching there. She had no success then, but three days later, in company with *Alden* she was escorting the oiler *Trinity* (5,375 tons) to Darwin when, at 6.30 a.m. on 20th January, about 60 miles west of Darwin, a Japanese submarine was sighted and attacked.

On receipt of the enemy report in Darwin, the N.O.I.C., Captain Thomas,⁹ ordered the corvettes *Deloraine*, *Katoomba* and *Lithgow*,¹ to help in the attack. *Deloraine* (Lieut-Commander Menlove²) which had commissioned in Sydney on 23rd November 1941, arrived at Darwin on 7th January 1942 and joined the 24th Minesweeping Flotilla there. *Katoomba* (Commander Cousin³) which had commissioned in December 1941, and *Lithgow* (Commander Knight⁴) in service since the previous June, reached Darwin on 19th January escorting a convoy from Thursday Island. *Deloraine* was sweeping the Darwin searched channel on the morning of the 20th when, at 11.55, she received orders to join in the submarine hunt. At 1.35 p.m., as she was nearing the submarine's reported position, she was attacked by a submerged submarine whose torpedo she evaded. Having secured a good asdic contact, *Deloraine* carried out a series of depth charge attacks (resulting in the appearance of large oil and air bubbles) until 3 p.m., when her outfit of twenty depth charges was expended. At 4.20 p.m. *Lithgow* joined her, and at 6 p.m. *Katoomba*, who took over as senior officer and shortly sent *Deloraine* in towards Darwin to get more depth charges from the anti-submarine patrol vessel *Vigilant*.⁵ At 3.5 a.m. on the 21st January, when rejoining the other

⁹ Capt E. P. Thomas, OBE; RN. Served RAN 1931-33 and 1939-48: NOIC Darwin 1939-42, Brisbane 1942-48. Of Hamilton, Qld; b. England, 9 May 1890.

¹ HMAS's *Deloraine*, *Katoomba* and *Lithgow*, corvettes (1941), 733 tons, one 4-in gun, 16 kts.

² Lt-Cdr D. A. Menlove, DSO, RD; RANR(S). HMAS *Adelaide* 1939-41; comd HMAS's *Deloraine* 1941-42, *Kapunda* 1942; HMAS's *Kanimbla* and *Westralia* 1943; comd HMAS's *Latrobe* 1944, *Manoora* 1944, *Platypus* 1944-45. Of Murrumburrah, NSW; b. Temora, NSW, 24 Aug 1906.

³ Capt A. P. Cousin, DSO, RD; RANR(S). (HMS *Agincourt* 1918.) HMAS *Warrego* 1939-40; comd HMAS's *Katoomba* 1941-43, *Manoora* and SNO Aust Landing Ships, SWPA, 1944-47. Of Toowoomba, Qld; b. Clifton, Qld, 29 Mar 1900.

⁴ Capt A. V. Knight, OBE, DSC, RD; RANR(S). Comd HMAS's *Lithgow* 1941-42, *Westralia* 1943; Sea Transport Officer, Sydney, 1944-47. Of Manly, NSW; b. Dover, Eng, 20 Feb 1897.

⁵ HMAS *Vigilant* (1938), 106 tons, one 3-pdr gun, 14 kts; renamed *Sleuth* in Apr 1944 and *Hawk* in Mar 1945.

two ships with another fifteen depth charges, *Deloraine* got a firm submarine contact and at once attacked. *Katoomba* joined her at 3.56 a.m., and from then on until her remaining depth charges were all used, *Deloraine* carried out a series of attacks under *Katoomba's* direction. At the time it was reported by A.C.H. Darwin, that there was good reason to believe that three submarines had been destroyed—two by *Deloraine* and one by *Katoomba*; but only one, *I 124*, was subsequently located, sunk in twenty-seven fathoms, in 12 degrees 24 minutes south, 129 degrees 49 minutes east. *I 124*, first unit of the Japanese Navy to fall victim to the R.A.N., was one of four of her class specially equipped for minelaying, and was also fitted with petrol tanks on the upper deck for refuelling aircraft. She had a displacement of 1,163 tons and a surface speed of 14½ knots. The peculiar construction of her class made them difficult boats to handle, very cranky, and hard to manoeuvre submerged. In the final assessment⁶ credit for her destruction was given to U.S.S. *Edsall* and the three Australian ships.

V

On 21st January, the day after the destruction of *I 124*, the Japanese made their second move against the Netherlands East Indies, when the Tarakan and Menado invasion forces continued their advance in simultaneous operations against Balikpapan in Borneo and Kendari in Celebes. The eastern flank of this advance was covered by strong air support. The *21st Air Flotilla*, from Menado, carried out reconnaissance over western New Guinea, and strikes on the Kendari and Ambon areas. Additional air support was given by aircraft of the *2nd Carrier Division*, *Soryu* and *Hiryu*, which had spent a short period in the Japanese home islands after the attack on Pearl Harbour, and arrived in waters east of Halmahera on 23rd January. Ambon suffered a heavy air raid on 15th January, when twenty-six bombers escorted by twelve fighters raided Laha airfield. Five Allied aircraft and a petrol dump were destroyed, and the runway damaged. There were more raids on Ambon—and resulting damage and losses—on the 24th and 25th January.

The Balikpapan invasion force of practically the same formation as that which took Tarakan, sailed from that island on 21st January—sixteen transports carrying the *56th Regimental Group* escorted by Nishimura in *Naka* with his destroyers. Air cover, as in the former instance, was to have been given by the *23rd Air Flotilla*, but bad weather made this impracticable. The invasion force was sighted by Allied reconnaissance aircraft on 21st January (a report described it as of fifteen warships and thirty-eight transports); and, as at Tarakan, columns of smoke from Balikpapan soon indicated that demolition of the oilfields was in progress. Meanwhile Allied counter action was taken.

⁶ *German, Italian and Japanese U-Boat Casualties during the war.* (Comd 6843, June 1946), p. 31.

Air strikes on the convoy were ordered. Eight submarines—six American from Surabaya, *Pickrel*, *Porpoise*, *Saury*, *Spearfish*, *Sturgeon* and *S 40*;⁷ and two Dutch, *K 18*⁸ and *K 14*—were sent to Macassar Strait; and on 20th January Task Force 5 (then consisting, as a striking force, of *Boise* (flag), *Marblehead*, and destroyers *John D. Ford*, *Pope*, *Parrott* and *Paul Jones*)⁹ which was refuelling at Koepang Bay, was ordered to make a night attack on the convoy. Rear-Admiral Glassford took his ships to sea forthwith, and set course for the Strait of Macassar via Sape Strait between the islands of Sumbawa and Flores. Passing through Sape Strait *Boise* struck an underwater obstruction and holed her bottom. Glassford sent her to Tjilatjap for inspection, shifted his flag to *Marblehead* (which could only steam at 15 knots owing to engine trouble) and sent the four destroyers on ahead to attack, after arranging a post-attack rendezvous position ninety miles south of Balikpapan, where *Marblehead* could cover the destroyers' withdrawal. (*Boise* thus completed her service in the ABDA Area, and from Tjilatjap went on to India for repairs.)

The destroyers pushed on through Sape Strait, and steered north to skirt the west coast of Celebes until, at 7.30 p.m. on 23rd January, they altered course in the darkness to head north-west across Macassar Strait to Balikpapan, where the Japanese convoy was arriving from the northwards. It was while both forces were approaching Balikpapan that the first attack was made on the convoy—by Dutch Glenn Martin bombers—and the transport *Nana Maru* (6,764 tons) was sunk.¹ Two of the original sixteen transports to leave Tarakan landed their troops on the coast twenty miles south of the main landings. The remaining thirteen anchored off Balikpapan at midnight on the 23rd, silhouetted from seaward against the flare and glow from the burning oilfields on shore. About half an hour later the Dutch submarine *K 18* torpedoed and sank a second transport, *Tsuruga Maru* (6,988 tons). This attack, the only success by the Allied submarines on this occasion, was apparently that which induced Nishimura to take *Naka* and the destroyers to seaward to carry out anti-submarine patrols. In any case his doing so left the way clear for the four American destroyers making up at 27 knots from the south-east. Evading a challenging patrol, they arrived at the anchorage and first sighted their quarry at 2.46 a.m. on the 24th. Transports were their targets, and torpedoes the primary weapons, and for an hour and a quarter (until *John D. Ford*, the Senior Officer and last to leave, headed south from the scene at 4 a.m.) the four ships sped around and through the two lines of anchored

⁷ *Pickrel*, US submarine (1937), 1,330 tons, one 4-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes; sunk in Jap home waters May 1943.

Porpoise, US submarine (1936), 1,310 tons, one 4-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 20 kts.

Saury and *Spearfish*, US submarines (1939), 1,475 tons, one 4-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 20 kts.

Sturgeon, US submarine (1938), 1,445 tons, one 4-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17 kts.

S 40, US submarine (1923), 800 tons, one 3-in gun, four 21-in torp tubes, 14.5 kts.

⁸ *K 18*, Dutch submarine (1933), 782 tons, one 3.5-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17 kts; lost Jan-Mar 1942.

⁹ *Houston*, *Edsall* and *Edwards* were escorting in the Darwin area, and the rest of Task Force 5 was refitting or escorting.

¹ According to the Dutch Historical Section the transport *Jukka Maru* (5,706 tons) was probably also sunk in this attack, and *Tatsukami Maru* (7,064 tons) damaged.

transports attacking with torpedoes and, when these were expended, gun fire. Considering the targets and the opportunities, the results were disappointing. Unfortunately the attack was carried out at too high a speed for the close range; while possibly the shallowness of the water also contributed towards making the proportion of torpedo "misses" unduly high. Of a possible twelve transports, the destroyers, for the expenditure of forty-eight torpedoes, sank three—*Sumanoura Maru* (3,519 tons); *Tatsukami Maru* (7,064); and *Kuretake Maru* (5,175); together with the small patrol boat No. 37 (750 tons). Possibly two other transports *Asahisan Maru* (4,550 tons) and *Kamogawa Maru* (6,440), were damaged. Nishimura's destroyers failed to make contact with the American ships, which withdrew successfully and, soon after 8 a.m., rejoined *Marblehead* and retired to Surabaya. This encounter off Balikpapan was the first American surface action in the Pacific war; "indeed, the first undertaken by the United States Navy since 1898".² It failed, however, to even check the Japanese progress in Borneo. Landings at Balikpapan began at dawn on 24th January. No opposition was encountered on shore, and on the 28th of the month the 23rd Air Flotilla was established on the airfields there.

This Balikpapan encounter emphasised the faultiness, at this stage, of American torpedoes which, in common with the British, were much inferior to the Japanese, with the American more markedly so. The U.S. Naval Historian remarks of this action that the

reasons for the numerous misses of torpedoes can only be guessed. Probably a large proportion of them were duds, for that was so in other actions at this stage of the war.

And comparing Japanese and American practice and achievement, he remarks:

Torpedo development was an outstanding technical achievement of the Japanese Navy. As a result of research between 1928 and 1933, first an oxygen-enriched and then a completely oxygen-fuelled torpedo was invented. Post-war studies by our experts found that the Japanese Type 95 Model 2 torpedo (24-inch) had a speed of 49.2 knots with a range of 5,760 yards, and carried a 1,210-pound explosive charge. And they credited the Japanese claim that their Type 93 Model 1 torpedo could do 49 knots with a range of 22,000 yards. (The best destroyer and submarine torpedoes that the United States had at the beginning of the war were 21 inches in diameter, capable of 46 knots for 4,500 yards.) Moreover, the Japanese Navy expended torpedoes lavishly in practice and at manoeuvres, thus improving them constantly; while the United States Navy for reasons of economy had to be content with dummy runs, and never found out what was the matter with its torpedoes until the war had been going on many months.³

An Australian naval officer who was a torpedo specialist also blamed

² S. E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. III (1948), *The Rising Sun in the Pacific*, p. 291. Morison says (p. 290) that *Tsuruga Maru* was possibly sunk by gunfire from *Ford* about 4 a.m. Helfrich in his "Notes" says the Japanese ship was sunk by Dutch submarine *K 18*. A Japanese report ("Invasion of the Dutch East Indies" ATIS translation AL.1096) says that at "a little past 0030 on 24 January a vessel (apparently torpedo boat) sighted SW of anchorage. Soon after an explosion and one vessel of convoy struck." This vessel sank. According to the Japanese report the American destroyers did not attack until nearly four hours after this incident. But the Joint Assessment Committee gave credit for the sinking of *Tsuruga Maru* to the destroyers.

³ Morison, p. 23.

"economy" as a reason for the shortcomings of British torpedoes. In a letter to the author he wrote:

The torpedo man in between the two wars was very much the least of the technical boys in the British navies. He was vastly overworked with all the new techniques quite apart from torpedoes. Because the torpedo was decried, naval funds were handed to it in a most parsimonious manner. The brilliant technical and inventive brains of such people as Carslake⁴ could not be given free rein. It would be quite clear to any junior engineer that the whole design of our torpedoes was wrong and that all we were attempting to do was to try and get some good working out of a bad basic design. To have scrapped all torpedo making machinery and started again would, of course, have cost millions. . . . Not only were the American torpedoes childish toys but our own torpedoes were inferior, and considerably so, not only to the German but horribly so to the Japanese—they just got by.

Simultaneously with the landing at Balikpapan occurred that at Kendari in Celebes. The operation was carried out by the Sasebo marines who had earlier taken Menado. This force left Bangka roadstead in six transports on 21st January, escorted by *Nagara* and other ships of Kubo's 1st Base Force, and the eight destroyers of the 15th and 16th Divisions. Air and anti-submarine protection was again supplied by *Chitose* and *Mizuho*. The convoy passed south through Peleng Strait, hugging the eastern coast of Celebes, and arrived off Kendari at 2 a.m. on 24th January. Landings were effected at dawn in the face of weak resistance on shore, and the airfield—considered by the Japanese to be the best in the Netherlands East Indies—was occupied the same day. The 11th Seaplane Tender Division—*Chitose* and *Mizuho*—provided continuous air protection until the 21st Air Flotilla, after 25th January, established itself at Kendari. The Japanese were now in a position to mount land-based air attacks on the Allied air reinforcement route from Australia to Singapore; and on the naval base at Surabaya. These were not long in coming.

VI

While these Japanese advances had been made in the central section of ABDA, enemy preparations were in train for assaults on either flank; and, the day before the occupation of Balikpapan and Kendari, powerful Japanese forces from Guam and Truk swept down on the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago, and assaulted and occupied Rabaul on New Britain and Kavieng on New Ireland, as a preliminary to the subjugation of the Archipelago and an attack on New Guinea. Naval command of the operation was vested in Vice-Admiral Inouye, of the *Fourth Fleet*; and plans called for the invasion of Rabaul by an army force supplemented by two small naval landing detachments of the *Maizuru Special Naval Headquarters*, and for a naval attack on Kavieng.

The invasion forces assembled in the Marianas and the Carolines between 5th and 13th January, those for Rabaul at Guam, those for Kavieng at Truk.⁵ Surface support was given by Rear-Admiral Goto's

⁴ Capt J. F. B. Carslake, RN. Head of Torpedo and Mining Development, Admiralty, from 1931.

⁵ A RAAF Hudson aircraft from Kavieng carried out photo reconnaissance of Truk on 9 Jan. It was over the target for 25 minutes, and reported 24 ships, including cruisers, destroyers, and transports.

6th Cruiser Squadron—*Aoba*, *Kinugasa*, *Kako*, *Furutaka*; air cover was provided by the *24th Carrier Division*, Rear-Admiral (Hideji) Goto in *Hijirigawa Maru*, with fourteen flying-boats, eighteen long-range bombers and nine carrier fighter aircraft; and submarines of the *7th Submarine Squadron*, Rear-Admiral Onishi in *Jingei*,⁶ were deployed south of St George's Channel (between New Ireland and New Britain) where they arrived on 21st January "for observation and ambush" duties. In addition, a strong task force under Vice-Admiral Nagumo, comprising the *Fifth Carrier Division*, *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*; the *First Division* of the *Third Battle Squadron*, *Hiyei* and *Kirishima*; the *Eighth Cruiser Squadron*, *Tone* and *Chikuma*; with *Abukuma* and destroyers of the *First Destroyer Squadron*; left Truk on 17th January to attack the air bases and crush the air power of the Allies, and support the invading forces.

Against these combined forces no more than a token defence of the Archipelago could be offered. Air defence was practically non-existent, and naval defence completely so, so that there was no opposition to enemy control of the approaches and surrounding seas. The Japanese target was the key to Australia's back door, a fact which had been in the mind of Mr Hughes nearly twenty-three years earlier when, as Prime Minister in September 1919, he had reminded the House of Representatives "how utterly the safety of Australia depended upon the possession of these islands . . . and that those who hold it [New Guinea] hold us".

New Britain and New Ireland, the immediate objective of the Japanese in January 1942, are a continuation to the eastward in sea-girt island peaks and ridges of that lofty mountain range which forms the backbone of New Guinea. The peaks and ridges continue to rise from the sea beyond New Britain and New Ireland to the south-east to form the Solomon Islands. Stretching a little over 2,000 miles from the westernmost point of New Guinea just east of the 130th meridian to the island of San Cristobal in 162 degrees East, the chain of islands is to Australia a defensive barrier against attack from the north, or a nearby enemy springboard, according to who holds it. At its closest only some sixty miles distant across the shallow, reef-strewn Torres Strait from Cape York, the northernmost point of the Australian mainland, the chain is in parts up to 1,000 miles from the Australian coast. On its northern side it is approximately a mean 600 miles from the parallel chain of the Caroline Islands, in 1942 held by the Japanese, and including advance naval and air bases in islands such as Truk and the more northerly Guam. Largest island in the Bismarck chain (and third to Australia in point of size among the islands of the world) is New Guinea, over 1,000 miles long from west to east and up to more than 400 miles wide from north to south. The backbone mountain range rises to 15,000 feet. The western half of the island, up to the 141st meridian, was Dutch; the eastern half was divided, the south-eastern portion, Papua, and the adjacent Trobriand, Woodlark, D'Entrecasteaux and Louisiade Islands being Australian terri-

⁶ *Jingei*, Jap submarine tender (1923), 5,160 tons, four 5.5-in guns, 16 kts; sunk 10 Oct 1944.

tory; and the northern portion, including also the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago, the Admiralty Islands, and the two northern islands—Buka and Bougainville—of the Solomons group, being held by Australia under League of Nations mandate. The rest of the Solomon Islands—including Guadalcanal, Savo, Malaita, San Cristobal, New Georgia, Choiseul, Shortland, Treasury, Vella Lavella, Rendova, Russell, Florida, and other islands—were a British Protectorate which was established in 1893. It then embraced only the southern islands, but included the northern islands after 1899. With a total land and sea area of 375,000 square miles, the British area was administered by a Resident Commissioner with headquarters at Tulagi, a small island off the south coast of Florida, north across a narrow strait from Guadalcanal.

The whole area, Bismarcks and Solomons, is within the tropics, lying between the equator and ten degrees south. The climate is hot, and wet with heavy tropical rains. Lowland temperatures remain in the 90's by day and rarely drop below 80 degrees at night. Heat and rain, and a rich volcanic soil, combine to produce prolific and luxuriant vegetation. Winds are monsoonal, south-east from May to November and north-west for the rest of the year. Both are wet, but generally the north-west is the wetter. The wider sea expanses, under the urge of the wind, can reach a roughness very apparent in small ships, and the active service conditions of night time "black out"—with the consequent closing of all light-releasing apertures in enclosed compartments—in the hot, damp atmosphere, made life at times extremely uncomfortable in all classes of ship, especially when crowded with enlarged war complements. Navigation, especially in the coastal areas, was hazardous. The seas are studded with coral reefs often rising sheer from considerable depths, and in 1942 were incompletely surveyed, while charts were based on surveys made many years earlier.

The population of Papua, Mandated New Guinea and the Solomons in 1942 was about 6,000 Europeans, 2,000 Asiatics, and about 1,400,000 natives, these being Melanesians and Papuans. Life in one of the islands was very like that in any of the others. Copra, the dried kernel of the coconut, was the main product of the area; cocoa and coffee were being planted; and gold had been mined in Papua, New Guinea and the Solomons. Oil was being sought. There were no railways in the area; and but few roads, restricted to serving immediate localities. Regular shipping lines connected the main ports with Australia and the Far East; and small inter-island vessels maintained local communications, serving the European settlements and plantations scattered along the coasts. There were many good—though undeveloped—harbours throughout the islands, notable among them, for size and maritime security, being Simpson Harbour (Rabaul), in New Britain; Seeadler Harbour, at Manus Island in the Admiralty group; and Fairfax Harbour (Port Moresby) and Milne Bay, in Papua.

From the beginning of the twentieth century Rabaul was the capital of the New Guinea Territory, made so by the German administration of the time. On the north-east shore of Simpson Harbour, Blanche Bay

(at the northern tip of New Britain), it comprised a European town of bungalows and a few larger buildings set in tree-lined streets, and a Chinatown of crowded, galvanised-iron shacks and shops. There were wharves on the waterfront, and copra storage sheds. The town harboured some 1,000 Europeans, 700 Asiatics, and about 3,000 natives. In 1937 Rabaul was showered with pumice and volcanic mud to a depth of a foot or more as the result of an eruption. There were further volcanic disturbances in mid-1941, when it was decided to transfer the capital to Lae. Only the preliminaries of the move had been made when Japan entered the war. The capital of Papua was Port Moresby, built on a ridge forming the eastern boundary of Fairfax Harbour, a reef-enclosed indentation on the south coast of Papua, some 300 miles E.N.E. from Australia's Cape York; about 100 miles due south of Lae; and 450 miles south-west of Rabaul. Port Moresby's hinterland is in contrast to much of New Guinea, being a dry area of some twenty miles radius from the town to the foothills of the Owen Stanley range to the north.

Such defences as there were in the Territories in January 1942 were concentrated at Rabaul and Port Moresby, with some small army detachments at Kavieng, the Admiralty Islands, Buka Passage and Tulagi. The main force was at Port Moresby, where the original military strength of a little more than a battalion was increased to a brigade at the beginning of January 1942. There were three airfields, the Seven Mile, the Three Mile, and Ela Beach; an air force of a few flying-boats; and a coast defence battery of two 6-inch guns. The navy at Port Moresby was represented by a small base force under Commander Hunt as N.O.I.C., with only small local defence vessels such as minesweepers. Rabaul was defended by a battalion of the A.I.F.; a detachment a little over 100 strong of the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles (formed from the European residents of the Territory when war broke out in 1939); two 6-inch coast defence guns on Praed Point at the northern entrance to Blanche Bay, and two anti-aircraft guns on the North Daughter, north of Simpson Harbour, and a squadron of the Royal Australian Air Force. There were two airfields, one at Lakunai, near the town, and the other at Vunakanau, fifteen miles to the south. Here again the navy was represented by a small base staff—ten all told—commanded by Lieutenant Mackenzie, Naval Intelligence Officer. Without reinforcement, including the accession of considerable air and naval strength, the existing defences in the Territories could not hope to be more than a delaying factor in the face of determined and continued Japanese advance in strength. As has been previously remarked, it was as such that the Rabaul force was regarded by the Australian Chiefs of Staff.

There was, however, one force in the area which was now to come into action, and to a considerable and increasing extent to remain in action even in territory overrun by the Japanese. That was the Coast-watching Organisation, members of which were in position on islands where they were so strategically placed as to be able to give warning of Japanese movements and impending attacks. Most of these coastwatchers were

civilians—either Administration officers or planters—when Japan entered the war. They were told that, as such, it was the policy of the Naval Board that they were to cease reporting in the event of an enemy occupying their area. They however elected to remain and to continue reporting, sending by teleradio operational intelligence of the greatest value. Thursday Island, Port Moresby, Rabaul, Tulagi, and Vila in the New Hebrides, each with its Naval Intelligence Officer representing and responsible to Commander Long, the D.N.I. in Navy Office, was each the centre of a coastwatching network through which operational intelligence from its area was filtered and relayed, for such action as could be taken, to the various local authorities and to the Central War Room in Melbourne. Within a few weeks after Japan entered the war, the civilian coastwatchers in the Territories were given naval rank or rating in the R.A.N.V.R., and badges and rank stripes were dropped from aircraft to those behind the Japanese lines. These proved, however, no safeguards to those unfortunate enough to be captured.

The first enemy sighting in the Bismarck Archipelago was on 9th December 1941, when C. L. Page,⁷ a coastwatcher on Tabar Island, about eighty miles east of Kavieng and on the direct air route from Truk to Rabaul (from which last-named it is also distant about eighty miles) saw and reported an aircraft on its way to reconnoitre Rabaul. The air was clear of the enemy until the end of the month, when large flying-boats examined Lae, Salamaua and Madang, on New Guinea. Rabaul had its first air raid, by twenty-two heavy bombers, on 4th January 1942. Page reported the aircraft over Tabar at 10 a.m., and they reached Rabaul forty minutes later and dropped their bombs near Lakunai airfield, doing no damage but killing ten natives. Eleven flying-boats, reported by Page at 6 p.m. on the 4th, reached Rabaul shortly before 7 p.m. and dropped bombs on Vunakanau airfield, causing neither damage nor casualties. There was a third raid, by nine flying-boats, on 6th January; and a fourth next day by twenty-two naval heavy bombers—these two attacks again being on Vunakanau airfield.

Photo-reconnaissance of Truk by an aircraft from Kavieng on 9th January disclosed a concentration of twenty-four ships there. This, coupled with American intelligence reports of enemy concentrations in the Marshall Islands, and indications that the *First* and *Fifth Carrier Divisions* were in the area, suggested an impending Japanese operation of which the most likely objective was believed by Australian C.O.I.C. to be Fiji, "with a view to interrupting the trans-Pacific air ferry route and the securing of an important strategic naval base for attacking our trans-Pacific sea communications". The Naval Board asked the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet, if any American naval action could be taken against these concentrations. But the Americans were still occupied with the broad mission of the Pacific Fleet as it was visualised in the initial stocktaking after Pearl Harbour: "to retain what America held in the Pacific as a base

⁷ Sub-Lt C. L. Page, RANVR. Of Bondi, NSW, and Tabar Island; b. 1911. Presumed executed by Japanese, on Nembo Island, 21 Jul 1942.

for future offensives while securing communications along the line Panama-Samoa-Fiji-New Zealand; and West Coast-Pearl Harbour-Fiji-New Caledonia-Australia." The fleet's two primary tasks of almost equal importance were to protect the Midway-Johnston-Hawaii triangle and maintain the above communications; and to these was now added an urgent commitment. On 11th January a Japanese submarine shelled the U.S. naval base at Pago Pago and, concerned lest that and the mandates concentrations portended an enemy thrust there, the Americans gave priority to the shepherding to Samoa of a convoy of Marine reinforcements, which was escorted by Admiral Halsey's *Enterprise* carrier group, and a new fast carrier group formed on *Yorktown* and commanded by Rear-Admiral Fletcher. On the same day that the Japanese submarine shelled Samoa, the 11th January, another Japanese submarine succeeded in torpedoing the aircraft carrier *Saratoga*, 500 miles south-west of Pearl Harbour. The carrier did not sink, but had to go to the United States for repairs and modernisation, and was to be out of the combat area for six months; so that despite the advent of the new *Yorktown* force, the available U.S. carrier task forces remained at three, the third of which, the *Lexington* force, was covering the Midway-Johnston-Palmyra islands line which was the shield of the Hawaiian group. The Samoa operation was completed on 23rd January. Meanwhile, as Admiral Royle told the War Cabinet on 13th January, a signal from Nimitz regretted "the inability of the U.S. Pacific Fleet to operate against Japanese naval concentrations in the Carolines and Marshalls in the immediate future owing to other commitments".

In the circumstances there was little that could be done by the Australian authorities other than to watch and wait on events so far as Rabaul was concerned. After the fourth Japanese air raid on 7th January there was a lull for a few days, the only enemy air activity in the area being an occasional reconnaissance. Australian air operations were limited to reconnaissance on, and two expeditions against, Truk, by five and six Catalina aircraft respectively, from Kavieng. On each occasion only one aircraft reached its objective, with unknown results. On 16th January the enemy returned to the attack with two heavy raids on Rabaul, one on Vunakanau and one on Lakunai airfield, causing little damage. The same day aircraft machine-gunned Kavieng. Enemy reconnaissance was extended, again reaching as far as the New Guinea mainland.

On 20th January Rabaul had its heaviest air raid so far, by upwards of 100 aircraft, including a number of carrier-borne bombers and fighters. No damage was done to the township or either airfield and, thanks to timely coastwatcher warning, there were few casualties. Five defending fighters were destroyed, as was also the Norwegian ship *Herstein* which, having been in convoy "ZK.5" to Moresby early in the month, had gone on thence to Rabaul. Kavieng was raided for two hours on the 21st, on which day the Japanese carried out air attacks on New Guinea. A number of bombers, and twelve fighters, bombed and machine-gunned Salamaua for forty minutes, doing extensive damage to hangars and other

installations and destroying a number of grounded aircraft; Lae also was attacked with dive-bombing and machine-gun fire for forty-five minutes; Madang was another target, and the airfield at Bulolo was machine-gunned by five fighters. On that afternoon four Japanese cruisers were reported by an Australian reconnaissance aircraft south-west of Kavieng. These were probably the four ships of the *6th Squadron*, which was then thereabouts in support of the Rabaul-Kavieng operations. Three Catalina flying-boats were sent from Port Moresby to attack, but failed to sight the ships.

Rabaul was again heavily attacked by aircraft in the early morning of the 22nd, and in this raid both coast defence guns on Praed Point were put out of action. Navy Office, Melbourne, received a signal from Rabaul about 8.30 a.m. saying that naval codes had been destroyed, and that civilians were being moved inland. The commercial wireless station reported self demolition later in the day. Also on the 22nd a coastwatcher report was received that a warship was at Mussau Island (off the north-west end of New Ireland) all day on the 21st; and early in the afternoon of the 22nd a Rabaul message reported that eleven ships were 30 to 40 miles from Watom Island off the north of Gazelle Peninsula, and were making for Rabaul. Soon afterwards radio communications with Rabaul ceased; but a later message from Namatanai, on the east coast of New Ireland, stated that at 5.30 p.m. on the 22nd, seventeen warships and transports were sighted from Ulaputur (a village on the west coast of New Ireland) steaming towards Rabaul. Five Catalina flying-boats, three from Port Moresby and one each from Gizo and Tulagi in the Solomons, were sent to attack the reported ships but could not find them. From then a long, pregnant silence brooded over the area. At 7 p.m. on the 23rd, Salamaua radio reported that there were eleven transports in Rabaul harbour; and three cruisers, one destroyer, and one aircraft carrier nine miles off Praed Point. The Japanese were in occupation.⁸

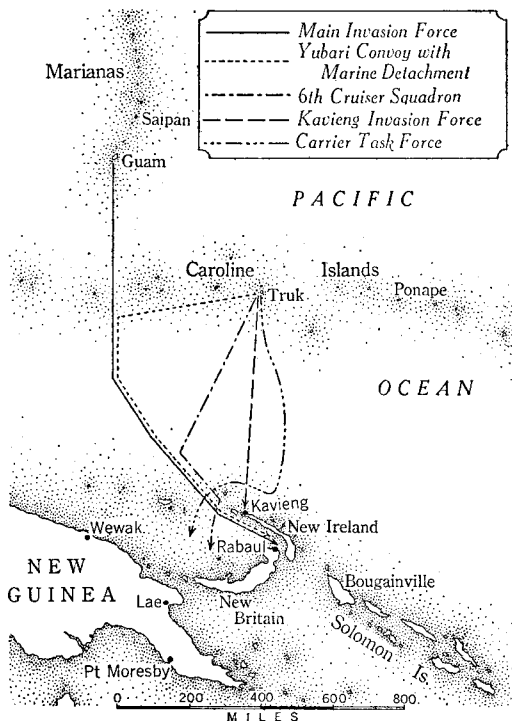
VII

The Japanese movement against Rabaul started on 14th January with the departure of the main invasion unit from Guam. It consisted of *Okinoshima* (flag of Rear-Admiral Shima), *Tsugaru* and *Tenyo Maru* of the *19th Minelayer Squadron*, carrying between them naval landing parties totalling 300 men; *Mutsuki* and *Mochizuki*⁹ of the *30th Destroyer Division*; and the armed merchant cruisers *Nikkai Maru* (2,562 tons) and *Kongo Maru* (8,624 tons); with a group of army transports. The convoy sailed due south, and on 17th January, when west of Truk, met a group consisting of *Yubari* (flag of Rear-Admiral Kajioka) and the destroyers *Oite*,

⁸ This message may have originated at Rabaul. During the morning of the 23rd a detachment of the fortress signals managed to get a teleradio working and one message was sent to Port Moresby to the effect that a "landing craft carrier" and other vessels were off Rabaul. This message was corrupted during transmission, and, as received, merely reported: "motor landing craft carrier off Crebuen [Credner] Island".

⁹ *Mutsuki* and *Mochizuki*, Japanese destroyers (1936-37) 1,315 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts; *Mutsuki* sunk off Santa Isabel 25 Aug 1942, *Mochizuki* sunk E of New Britain 24 Oct 1943.

Asanagi, and *Yunagi*¹ of the 29th Division and *Yayoi*² of the 30th; and an armed merchant cruiser, with two transports carrying elements of the *Maizuru Special Naval Landing Force* (Marines). Soon afterwards course was altered to the south-eastwards to pass between the Admiralty Islands and New Ireland, and in the evening of the 19th the augmented convoy met the 6th Cruiser Squadron, which had left Truk the previous day. They remained in company throughout the 20th and 21st, during which period the destroyers were fuelled and *Yunagi* was sent to reconnoitre Mussau Island—her presence there being reported, as stated above. The invasion force then steered south-east for Rabaul, while the 6th Cruiser Squadron covered the operations from a position south-west of Kavieng.



Meanwhile Nagumo's task force left Truk in the morning of the 17th and, north of New Ireland on the 20th, flew off the air striking forces which attacked Rabaul on that day. *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*, with *Chikuma* and three destroyers, then proceeded north about Mussau into the Bismarck Sea, whence the carriers launched the air attacks on Kavieng and New Guinea on the 21st, and thereafter continued in support of the invasion forces. The Kavieng invasion group, the 18th Cruiser Squadron, *Tenryu* (flag of Rear-Admiral Matsuyama); *Tatsuta*; the 23rd Destroyer Division, *Kikuzuki*, *Uzuki*, and *Yuzuki*;³ with converted merchant ships carrying the major part of the *Maizuru* Marines; a company of *Kashima* Marines; and an anti-aircraft gun unit; sailed from Truk in the afternoon of 20th January. The two forces reached their objectives around midnight on the 22nd.

¹ Japanese destroyers (1924-25), 1,270 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts; *Oite* sunk at Truk 18 Feb 1944; *Asanagi* sunk NW of Bonin Is 22 May 1944; *Yunagi* sunk NW of Luzon 25 Aug 1944.

² *Yayoi*, Japanese destroyer (1926), 1,315 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts; sunk off Normanby Island, 11 Sep 1942.

³ *Kikuzuki*, *Uzuki* and *Yuzuki*, Japanese destroyers (1926-27), 1,315 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts; *Kikuzuki* sunk off Tulagi 4 May 1942, *Uzuki* and *Yuzuki* off Leyte 11 and 13 Dec 1944.

At Rabaul the 144th Regiment landed on the night of the 22nd-23rd January, at Praed Point and Tawui, and at points between Raluana and Vulcan. While these landings were in progress the naval landing force of 126 men from *Tenyo Maru* landed on the unoccupied Credner Island, eight miles east of Praed Point, whence they proceeded to unite with the *Okinoshima* and *Tsugaru* detachments in landings on the western shore of Simpson Harbour shortly before dawn on the 23rd. Meanwhile the destroyer *Mochizuki* carried out diversionary gun fire in Ataliklikun Bay, across the peninsula from Simpson Harbour. With the destruction of the coast defence guns at Praed Point no opposition could be offered to the convoy and escorts, and the only air activity by the defenders was that of a lone aircraft which dropped flares over the ships. There was opposition to the landings on the western beaches, but daylight, disclosing the array of ships in the harbour, showed the defenders that they were outnumbered. By the afternoon of the 23rd the Japanese completely occupied Rabaul and the airfields. One hundred and thirty miles away to the north-west, the Kavieng force met no opposition in landings there at dawn on the 23rd. Nagumo's task force was back in Truk on 25th January, and the submarines reached there on the 29th. Until the end of the month the remaining forces were engaged in "mopping up" New Britain, New Ireland, and the surrounding islands of the Archipelago. As a result of their securing the area the Japanese were enabled, in the words of their report on the operation:⁴

to establish a base with ease for operations against New Guinea and Australia due to destruction of important enemy's defence installations by our powerful task force and base units which lowered enemy morale. Besides minor resistance encountered on Rabaul by the landing of our army force it was practically a bloodless occupation in all sectors of operations.

The only inaccuracy in the above excerpt is the reference to the "important enemy's defence installations". These were virtually non-existent.

VIII

For a considerable time after the Japanese invasion of New Britain, nothing was known in Australia of the fate of the Rabaul garrison, or of the civilian population. On 24th January a coastwatcher signal was received from Kavieng stating that the civilian wireless staff and other civilians there had moved out of the town into the bush, and that enemy marines had landed at Kavieng at daylight on the 23rd and were wrecking all buildings. On the 24th, too, the Japanese made their first statement about the Bismarcks when Tokyo Radio broadcast that: "Imperial Headquarters announce that at dawn, Friday, Japanese troops landed at Kavieng and at 4.15 p.m. Japanese naval units landed on New Britain near Rabaul." Not until the 15th February, three weeks after the landing, was it known in Australia—through coastwatcher channels—that the Australian garrison had withdrawn from the Rabaul area; and that the forces

⁴ ATIS document: "Full translation of a Report on the Japanese Invasion of Rabaul."

were believed to be scattered in small parties south of Rabaul. Effort was organised to rescue them.

There were coastwatchers on New Britain—Assistant District Officer McCarthy⁵ at Talasea on the north coast; and Assistant District Officer Daymond,⁶ who was with Patrol Officer Mitchell⁷ and Medical Assistant Squires⁸ at Gasmata on the south coast, opposite Talasea. McCarthy and Daymond made teleradio contact with Port Moresby when Rabaul failed to answer their signals. Those in Australia familiar with New Britain and its lack of interior physical communications, considered that the Japanese would not go far from Rabaul except by sea; and on 25th January Lieut-Commander Feldt, Supervising Intelligence Officer at Townsville, signalled to McCarthy and asked him to take his teleradio to Toma (at the road-head some thirty miles south of Rabaul) and report the situation. McCarthy—a civilian—was then at the western end of New Britain. He set off without demur on a 200-mile trek along the north coast to the eastward, maintaining radio silence after briefly announcing his departure.

Meanwhile the first of a series of air attacks on the Japanese ships at Rabaul was carried out by five Catalina aircraft from Port Moresby on the night 24th-25th January; and was followed by attacks (in each instance by five Catalinas) on the 26th, 28th, and 30th of January, and by four of the flying-boats on the night of 1st February and again on that of the 3rd-4th. It was believed that some ships were hit; there were no casualties among the attacking aircraft. On 27th January three enemy flying-boats bombed Gasmata; and in the night of 2nd-3rd February the Japanese made their first air attack on Port Moresby. Six aircraft dropped a total of some twenty bombs on the airfield. No military damage was done. One soldier was killed.

At 30th January a number of the coastwatching positions in the Archipelago and the Solomons were either permanently or temporarily out of wireless contact with Australia. Communication remained unbroken with Manus Island in the Admiralty group; Gasmata on New Britain; Kavieng and Namatanai on New Ireland; and Buka Passage in the Solomons; but some of these were soon to be overrun by the Japanese and their coastwatchers captured. First to go was Gasmata, where a Japanese party landed from destroyers on 9th February. Daymond and Squires were captured that day, a fact reported by Mitchell by teleradio. In reply he was instructed to cross New Britain and join McCarthy at Talasea, but he failed to do so. Not until the war was over was it learned that he too was captured. All three were lost in the *Montevideo Maru* (7,267 tons) in which they were being taken to Japan, when that ship was torpedoed by the American submarine *Sturgeon*, sixty miles north-west of Cape Bojodor, Luzon, on the 1st July 1942. At Namatanai were

⁵ Lt-Col J. K. McCarthy, MBE, NGX258. On special duties with Angau 1942-44; SO(CA)1, BBKAU 1945-46. District officer; of Talasea, New Britain; b. St Kilda, Vic, 20 Jan 1905.

⁶ J. E. Daymond. Of Essendon, Vic. Lost in sinking of *Montevideo Maru*, 1 Jul 1942.

⁷ Sub-Lt E. H. F. Mitchell, RANVR. Of Pott's Point, NSW. Lost in sinking of *Montevideo Maru*, 1 Jul 1942.

⁸ R. T. Squires. Of Sydney. Lost in sinking of *Montevideo Maru*, 1 Jul 1942.

A. F. Kyle⁹ and G. W. Benham,¹ assistant district officer and patrol officer respectively. After reporting the Japanese movement against Rabaul they moved down the east coast of New Ireland to Metlik, near Cape St George, collecting eight missionaries and planters on the way. From Metlik, Kyle telegraphed that he had a boat and a party of ten, and asked for directions. He personally was requested to remain. Benham remained with him. The rest reached safety in the boat, via Tulagi. Some weeks later the two coastwatchers, who had been joined by ten soldier escapers from Rabaul, and by another coastwatcher—District Officer McDonald²—with a party from Kavieng, were at Muliama on the bulge of New Ireland's east coast north of Cape St George. In all there were now twenty-one with Kyle and Benham. A boat was obtained which would just accommodate all twenty-three; but again Kyle and Benham remained to go on reporting, and watched the rest sail to safety. Later—at the end of May 1942, and again in July that year—attempts were made to bring them out by American submarines. But these efforts were fruitless—Kyle and Benham were captured and killed by the Japanese. The attempt at their rescue in July was made by the coastwatcher C. J. T. Mason³ who was put ashore at night near Muliama by canoe from U.S. Submarine *S 38* (Lieut-Commander Munson, USN). Mason failed to find any trace of Kyle and Benham. The next night he landed from the submarine on the Japanese-occupied Anir Island, to the east of Muliama, where was a coastwatcher, Roy Woodroffe.⁴ Mason met a friendly native from whom he learnt that Woodroffe was alive and hiding in the bush, and to whom he gave a note for Woodroffe fixing a rendezvous for the next night. There was a hitch in that arrangement, but, the next night again, Mason landed from the submarine. Thereafter for four nights the submarine awaited his return with Woodroffe, but neither appeared. Later it was learned that both had been taken and killed by the Japanese. Before these last-named coastwatchers lost their lives, others in the area had been captured. Two went in the very first days of the Japanese invasion—Allen,⁵ on the Duke of York Islands; and C. C. Jervis,⁶ a retired navy telegraphist who managed a plantation on Nissan atoll, and whose last communication with his own people was to report that a large steamer had stopped off the lagoon entrance in the forenoon of 23rd January. Both were lost in the *Montevideo Maru* on the 1st July 1942. About the middle of June 1942, C. L. Page and Jack Talmage⁷ were captured on Simberi Island in the Tabar group,

⁹ Lt A. F. Kyle, DSC; RANVR. (1st AIF: 4 Div Sig Co.) Of Cremorne, NSW; b. Toowoomba, Qld, 1897. Presumed died, in Japanese hands, 1 Sep 1942.

¹ Sub-Lt G. M. W. Benham, DSC; RANVR. Of Carlton, NSW. Presumed died, in Japanese hands, 1 Sep 1942.

² Major J. H. McDonald, DSO, MC. (1st AIF: Major, 20 Bn.) Of Gympie district, Qld; b. Summer Hill, NSW, 2 Nov 1887.

³ F-O C. J. T. Mason, 263679, RAAF. Plantation manager; b. Chatswood, NSW, 7 Jan 1903. Presumed died, in Japanese hands, 1943.

⁴ Ldg-Telegraphist R. Woodroffe, F329/10, RANR. HMAS *Olive Cam* 1941. Of Mosman, NSW; b. Kalgoorlie, WA, 11 Jan 1910. Presumed died, in Japanese hands, 8 Oct 1942.

⁵ A. G. Allen. Planter. Lost in sinking of *Montevideo Maru*, 1 Jul 1942.

⁶ C. C. Jervis. Plantation Manager. Lost in sinking of *Montevideo Maru*, 1 Jul 1942.

⁷ Jack Talmage. Planter. Presumed died, in Japanese hands, Sep 1942.

and were executed; and early in 1943 two more coastwatchers—A. R. Olander⁸ and W. L. Tupling⁹—died at the hands of the Japanese on New Britain. But others took the places of those who were thus eliminated, and the work of the coastwatchers continued increasingly throughout the war.

IX

As stated above, the navy's representation at Rabaul was small—ten all told, operating a coastwatcher radio centre under the command of Lieutenant-Commander Mackenzie. On 22nd January, the day the Japanese were expected to land, Mackenzie sent his junior officer, Sub-Lieutenant Gill, with Chief Yeoman Lamont¹ and two ratings in a truck with teleradio and supplies to establish a radio reporting post near Toma, at the roadhead. During the night 22nd-23rd, the Japanese landed at Rabaul; and soon the withdrawing Australian troops were arriving at Toma, there abandoning their vehicles, now useless since this was the roadhead, and striking off into the bush on foot. When Mackenzie with the rest of the naval staff arrived later, it was obvious to him that Toma, with the complete collapse of the defence at Rabaul, was valueless as an observation and reporting post. To remain there was uselessly to sacrifice his small staff. The teleradio, without transport, was now an encumbrance. It was accordingly destroyed, and the naval staff, joining up with a small military party which arrived at the roadhead, set off under Mackenzie's guidance for the south coast, whence it was hoped that escape to the Trobriand Islands, and thence to New Guinea, might be possible.

Meanwhile McCarthy had set out to try to make contact with the Australian forces. At Talasea he was joined by two volunteer and insistent helpers, planters Marsland² and Douglas.³ Douglas was left to hold the base at Talasea while McCarthy and Marsland proceeded eastwards in the motor-launch *Aussi*. At a plantation at Pondo (on the northern edge of Open Bay, and forty miles south-west across Gazelle Peninsula from Rabaul) McCarthy was joined by three local men—Olander, a plantation manager (mentioned above), and Bell⁴ and Holland,⁵ timber men. Here, too, McCarthy and Marsland met the first troops from Rabaul—Captain Cameron⁶ and eleven soldiers. From them McCarthy got the initial story of Rabaul, which was transmitted to Port Moresby by teleradio on 14th

⁸ Sub-Lt A. R. Olander, RANVR. Plantation manager; b. 1909. Presumed died, in Japanese hands, 7 Mar 1943.

⁹ PO W. L. Tupling, BV146, RANVR. Plantation manager; of Ashfield, NSW, and New Britain. Presumed died, in Japanese hands, 20 Mar 1943.

¹ Chief Yeoman of Signals S. Lamont, PM1325, RANR. Was installed as coastwatcher on Anir Island early in 1940, and was relieved by Woodroffe early in 1942. He arrived in Rabaul on his way south for leave shortly before Rabaul fell. Captured by the Japanese he was lost in *Montevideo Maru* on 1 Jul 1942. Of South Yarra, Vic; b. Coleraine, Ireland, 18 Oct 1898.

² F-Lt G. H. R. Marsland, MBE; 255565, RAAF. Plantation owner; b. Melbourne, 1 Dec 1912.

³ Lt K. C. Douglas, RANVR. Plantation owner; of San Remo, Talasea; b. Hobart, 13 Nov 1903.

⁴ Lt L. J. Bell, RANVR. Planter and timber cutter. Of Hobart; b. Wandella, Qld, 1906. Missing believed killed, about April 1943.

⁵ Capt F. Holland, MBE, VX102689. Timber getter; b. Enfield, Eng, 15 Oct 1907.

⁶ Lt-Col A. G. Cameron, DSO, VX44906. CO 3 Bn 1942-43, 3/22 Bn 1943, 2/2 Bn 1943-45. Bank clerk; of Elwood, Vic; b. Brunswick, Vic, 16 May 1909.

February. McCarthy also learned of other parties of survivors, believed to total some 400 troops scattered on the north coast beaches, sick and starving; and some 300 (including Mackenzie's party) on the south coast. He sent Holland to the south coast to round up the parties there, and return with them to Open Bay; and prepared a plan for the rescue of all he could gather, and requested Port Moresby for authority to carry it out. On 16th February he received a signal from Major-General Morris,⁷ commanding the forces in New Guinea, telling him to carry out the plan with authority to do so "over all officers irrespective of rank".

McCarthy's plan envisaged a journey of over 200 miles to Sag Sag, on the western tip of New Britain. The route was halved as to responsibility. Douglas was put in charge of the island to the west of the Willaumez Peninsula, and Olander from the Willaumez Peninsula to Pondo. Marsland was given the responsibility of shipping and transport. The total route was split up between fourteen base camps; and arrangements were made for parties to proceed at regular intervals, each under an officer or N.C.O. Food supplies were allocated—a half pound of rice and one coconut per man daily. McCarthy travelled the coast picking up survivors, and concentrated some 200 at Pondo, whence, trekking on land, and with the worst of the sick carried in *Aussi* and the small schooner *Malahuka*, they struggled westwards.

Away on the south coast the parties in that area were also trying to make to the west. A large group was intercepted by Japanese at Tol, in Wide Bay, and massacred. Others got past the enemy, and were held up farther west by the Japanese occupation of Gasmata. Mackenzie and his naval party were in the rear of the main body, which was reached by Holland after a marathon walk across the island. Mackenzie decided to send all the naval party—except himself and three others—with Holland and the main body north to join McCarthy. He remained to round up those on the south coast who were too far away to join the Holland party. It was on the journey north that the naval party suffered its four casualties. Dysentery broke out. Signalman Francis⁸ died on the track at Ril on the 24th February; and Yeoman Knight⁹ and Writer Douglas,¹ too sick to go any farther, were left at a mission station at the head of Wide Bay. Chief Yeoman Lamont decided to stay with them and nurse them. The three of them were not seen again. Holland and his south-coast party reached the north coast at Valoka, thirty miles east of Talasea, on the 14th March; and a signal from Mackenzie (given by him to Gill with instructions to send it as soon as a telradio was reached) was sent to Port Moresby, saying that he was rounding up surviving troops and concentrating them

⁷ Maj-Gen B. M. Morris, CBE, DSO, VX285. (1st AIF: 55 Siege Bty and 5 Div Art.) Comdtd 8 MD 1941-42; comd NG Force 1942, Angau 1942-46. Regular soldier; of Upper Beaconsfield, Vic; b. East Melbourne, 19 Dec 1888.

⁸ Signalman A. E. Francis, PM2337; RANR. HMAS *Adelaide* 1941. Grocer's assistant; of Brighton, Vic; b. Brighton, 24 Oct 1920. Died 24 Feb 1942.

⁹ Yeoman of Signals G. P. T. Knight, S1782; RANR. Of Maroubra, NSW; b. London, 1 May 1911. Died 5 Mar 1942.

¹ Writer T. I. Douglas, PM3146; RAN. Of Annandale, NSW; b. Annandale, 16 Aug 1915. Died 5 Mar 1942.

at Waterfall Bay, some 100 miles E.N.E. of Gasmata. Commander Hunt, Naval Officer in Charge, Port Moresby, made plans for their rescue.

In the meantime arrangements had been made in New Guinea for the rescue of the northern parties. Major Townsend,² of the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (Angau) which supplanted the civil administration after the fall of Rabaul, collected a number of motor-launches. These were manned by volunteers and commanded by G. C. Harris,³ and they foregathered at Rooke Island in Vitiaz Strait off the western tip of New Britain, and thence (unarmed, and the fastest boat capable of only eight knots) set out along New Britain's north coast. There, on the west side of Talasea station, McCarthy's party met the four launches *Gnair*, *Bavaria*, *Umboi* and *Totol*. It was learned that the motor-schooner *Lakatoi*⁴ was at the Witu Islands, some fifty miles north-west of Talasea, and on the 19th March a party in *Gnair*, under Marsland, sailed and took her over. The rest of McCarthy's party (except Douglas and Olander, who decided to remain in New Britain and report enemy intelligence to Port Moresby) were then ferried across to Witu in *Totol* and *Bavaria*. Two men, Bell and MacNicol,⁵ elected to remain on Witu as coastwatchers. Of the rest, 214 (including two women, Mrs Baker⁶ and her half-caste maid) embarked in *Lakatoi* and after a hazardous voyage through Japanese-controlled waters reached Cairns safely on 28th March 1942. The same journey was successfully accomplished by a small party in *Gnair*.

Mackenzie, in the south, had meanwhile met a large party of troops which had been concentrated at Palmalmal plantation, Waterfall Bay, by Major Owen⁷ and Major Palmer.⁸ Soon after *Lakatoi* was clear, Lieutenant Timperly⁹ of Angau, slipped across in a fast launch from the Trobriand Islands (130 miles S.S.E. of Gasmata) to Waterfall Bay, located the party, and told Port Moresby by teleradio that the area was clear of the enemy. H.M.A.S. *Laurabada*,¹ formerly the Papuan Administrator's yacht, but now requisitioned for naval service, sailed from the Trobriands under the command of Lieutenant Champion,² reached Waterfall Bay on 9th April, and there embarked 156, including Mackenzie and the balance of the naval party, and landed them safely at Port Moresby, whence they

² Lt-Col G. W. L. Townsend, OBE, VX117176. (1st AIF: Lt 3 Army Bde AFA.) DD Dist Services, HQ Angau 1942; SOS, FELO 1942-45. Of Camberwell, Vic; b. Sandgate, Qld, 5 Apr 1896.

³ Capt G. C. Harris, PX98. Central Bureau Intell Corps 1942-44. Of Guildford, WA; b. 4 Jun 1911. Killed in action 25 Mar 1944.

⁴ *Lakatoi* (1938), Burns Philp and Co, 341 tons; lost Sept 1942.

⁵ Ldg Seaman J. B. MacNicol, DSM, BV180; RANVR. Eurasian resident manager of Iboki plantation, Talasea. B. Rabaul, 22 May 1901.

⁶ Mrs Gladys Baker, MBE. A widow who since her husband's death had managed her plantation on Witu; she was later awarded the MBE for her care of the sick and wounded in *Lakatoi*.

⁷ Lt-Col W. T. Owen, VX45223. 2/22 Bn, and CO 39 Bn 1942. Bank teller; of Leongatha, Vic; b. Nagambie, Vic, 27 May 1905. Killed in action 29 Jul 1942.

⁸ Lt-Col E. C. Palmer, OBE, NX35096. Comd 10 Fd Amb 1942-45. Medical practitioner; of Bulli, NSW; b. Coolgardie, WA, 22 Jan 1909.

⁹ Capt A. T. Timperly, MBE, PX176. Civil servant; b. Ipswich, Qld, 30 Dec 1915.

¹ HMAS *Laurabada*, 150 tons, 12 kts.

² Lt I. F. Champion, OBE; RANVR. Comd HMAS *Laurabada* 1942-43, *ML(HD)1325* 1944, *ML(HD)1353* 1944-45. Formerly Assistant Resident Magistrate, Papua. Chief Commnr, Native Land Commn, Papua and New Guinea, since 1952. B. Port Moresby, 9 Mar 1904.

went on to Townsville in the steamer *Macdhui* (4,561 tons) late in April. Other small parties, notably one under the leadership of D. A. Laws,³ escaped from New Britain to New Guinea and Australia later.⁴

The enemy's capture of Rabaul opened the door for his assault on New Guinea, the success of which would give him air and sea control of the Coral Sea and safeguard the road to an assault on New Caledonia and the New Hebrides, and the isolation from the east of Australia—if not an invasion of the Commonwealth. This aspect was discussed at a meeting of the War Cabinet, attended by the Chiefs of Staff, on 23rd January in Melbourne. The Chiefs of Staff expressed the view that the immediate objective of the Japanese would be the occupation of Rabaul, followed by operations against New Guinea designed to obtain control of Torres Strait. This, if successful, would deny Australia the use of the strait, and seriously affect the flow of supplies to Darwin and the Netherlands East Indies. Admiral Royle told the meeting it must be realised that Australia faced a possible attempt at invasion; though he did not consider it a probability, as the Japanese already had so much on their hands that Australia offered a less attractive target than other places. But he did not discount the possibility of an attack on Port Moresby. The main problem was to devolve measures to delay any farther southward progress by the enemy; and from the naval aspect the only action that could be taken immediately was the creation of a diversion elsewhere.

American preoccupation with the protection of Pacific Ocean communications and the reinforcement of Samoa had hitherto prevented any aggressive action on their part, but Royle referred to a cablegram of 16th January from the Australian naval attaché in Washington, which said that upon completion of the Samoa operation U.S. naval forces would make a sweep north-westwards to the Gilbert Islands. Royle had sent a message to Admiral Nimitz suggesting that the sweep should be extended to Jaluit in the Marshall Islands, and stating that had Australian dispositions allowed, the R.A.N. would have been glad to help. Nimitz replied: "Appreciated. Will be glad to consider for future."

On 27th January, with the agreement of the Advisory War Cabinet, Royle signalled to Nimitz that the Japanese occupation of Rabaul increased the threat to Port Moresby and New Caledonia; and that while the capture of Moresby would close Torres Strait to the Allies, that of New Caledonia would cut the sea and air ferry route between America and Australia and give the Japanese access to chrome and nickel. The signal continued:

It is understood that U.S. troops are now en route to Australia to form a garrison for defence of New Caledonia and will arrive in Australia in about 21 days when transports will have to be restowed. Time factor suggests that Japan, with so rich a prize, may act first, in which case the only immediate defence is a strong naval concentration in this area. On assumption that U.S. flag officer will now assume

³ Lt D. A. Laws, P479; Angau. Administration radio superintendent at Rabaul. Of Taringa, Qld; b. Brisbane, 26 Jul 1909. Killed in action 5 May 1943.

⁴ In writing this section—including the description of the Archipelago as well as that of the events in the period covered—the author is greatly indebted to that excellent and authoritative book: E. A. Feldt, *The Coast Watchers* (1946); and to J. K. McCarthy's report of the withdrawal.

command in Anzac Area and that one 8-inch and two 6-inch British cruisers will be available to join him, request that plans may now be concerted so that a sufficiently strong force may be concentrated in this area to deal with a force similar to that employed in the capture of Rabaul. It is believed that approximately one division was used in this operation, escort being two 8-inch, two 6-inch cruisers and two aircraft carriers.

This signal—the appreciation in which coincided with the U.S. Naval Intelligence belief that once the Japanese were established at Rabaul they would have the forces to spare for an invasion of New Caledonia and the New Hebrides—was instrumental in causing Admiral King to order Nimitz to send Vice-Admiral Wilson Brown's *Lexington* task force to reinforce the Anzac Area under Vice-Admiral Leary. Meanwhile, on concluding the Samoa operation, the *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* forces, on 1st February, carried out air attacks and bombardments against Wotje, Maloelap, Kwajalein, Jaluit and Mili in the Marshalls, and Makin in the Gilbert Islands. The material results of these raids were meagre; but the carrier air groups had useful combat practice, and the attack gave a valuable fillip to Allied morale when the news (with exaggerated estimates of the damage inflicted on the Japanese) was published. As a diversionary move it achieved little. It caused some agitation among the Japanese in the Marshalls, and brought about a reinforcement there, especially in air and submarine strength; and was the cause of a sweep to the area by *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* from Truk after their return there from the Rabaul assault. But it imposed no delay on the Japanese in their operations farther west; and while it was in progress they were, in fact, subjugating the island of Ambon, the next point on their list in their drive towards Java.

X

Since the initial landing of "Gull Force" at Ambon on the 17th December 1941, there had been small reinforcements from Australia. The transport *Bantam*, escorted by H.M.A.S. *Swan*, reached there on the 12th January and remained until the 18th. There were air raids on the 15th and 16th, that on the 16th being mainly directed at the harbour. *Swan* engaged the bombers and kept them at height, and neither ship suffered damage.

It will be recalled that the Japanese aircraft carriers *Soryu* and *Hiryu* of the *Second Carrier Division* arrived in the Halmahera area from Japan on the 23rd January to give additional air support to Vice-Admiral Takahashi, and protect his eastern flank during the attack on Kendari. The first intimation to the Allies of their presence was a raid on Ambon by seventeen carrier-type bombers and eighteen carrier-type fighters on the morning of the 24th January. The transport *Koolama*,⁵ escorted by H.M.A.S. *Warrego*, reached Ambon with supplies and more reinforcements on the 22nd January, and it was thought by Ambon's defenders

⁵ MV *Koolama* (1938), 4,068 tons; attacked and damaged by Japanese aircraft 20 Feb 1942; sunk Wyndham, WA, 3 Mar 1942 during Japanese air raid.

that they were the main objective of the Japanese in this carrier-borne raid, but in point of fact the two ships arrived back in Darwin on the date of the attack, the 24th.⁶ The attack, which caused little damage, was repeated on the 25th.

The Ambon invasion force—a force of Kure marines, and an infantry regiment—left Davao on 27th January, and proceeded via Menado, whence it sailed on the 29th. Escort was provided by Rear-Admiral Tanaka in *Jintsu* with ten destroyers of the 2nd Flotilla; and *Chitose* of Fujita's 11th Seaplane Tender Division. North of Buru Island on the 30th, the convoy was joined by the seaplane carrier *Mizuho*, and minesweepers and submarine chasers, and divided for its respective landings. The army force proceeded to Butong on the southern side of Ambon, the navy to Hitu-lama on the north. Melbourne was told, by signal from the Australian detachment on Ambon at 2.30 p.m. on that day, that two Japanese convoys were approaching the island—one of six cruisers, five destroyers and five transports; the other of five destroyers and five transports. As with Rabaul, there was nothing that Australia could do but wait on events, with the knowledge that the small Australian-Dutch garrison on the island could do little more without outside help; and of that none was forthcoming. At 9.45 p.m. on 31st January, Darwin read a wireless message from the Australian air force at Laha, Ambon, reporting that demolition of the airfield there had been completed and the few surviving aircraft flown out; that all ciphers had been burnt; and that the Japanese had landed at Leahari and Hukurila—places about three miles apart on the east coast of Ambon, and five miles from the town of Ambon. The enemy had also reached Laha, on the west side of Ambon Bay, opposite the town of Ambon, from overland. These last were the marines, who had a stiff fight for the airfield, which they did not capture until 2nd February. The army, on the other hand, captured the town without much resistance. The only losses or damage inflicted on the enemy naval forces were by Dutch mines in Ambon Bay. These had been laid by the Dutch minelayer *Gouden Leeuw*,⁷ which left Surabaya unescorted on 23rd December 1941, carried out her mission successfully, and returned to Surabaya on 5th January. Her victims were the Japanese minesweepers (vessels of 630 tons) *No. 9* sunk; and *Nos. 11* and *12*⁸ damaged, during minesweeping operations on 2nd February, on which day Ambon, and the survivors of the Allied garrison, surrendered to the invaders, except for some small groups who made their way back to Australia.

In spite of the nominal unified Allied naval command in the ABDA Area, there was still a lack of cohesion—apparently to an extent a reflection of the lack of interchange of information, and the divergence of views between those responsible for the higher direction of the war in

⁶ Yet it may have been an objective. The Japanese account of the raid records: "No enemy ships or air force seen, so attacked batteries and other installations."

⁷ *Gouden Leeuw*, Dutch minelayer (1931), 1,291 tons, two 3-in guns, 15 kts; lost in NEI 1942.

⁸ Japanese minesweepers (1939), 630 tons, three 4.7-in guns, 20 kts; *Nos. 11* and *12* were sunk on 28 Mar 1945 and 6 Apr 1945 respectively.

Washington and London. It was remarked in the previous chapter that, earlier, five different national authorities controlled strategical naval dispositions in the area often without precise knowledge of what each other was doing. At this later stage this lack of precise knowledge remained. For example the Admiralty was still unaware what American naval, military and air forces were in the ABDA Area, or what reinforcements were on the way or projected; and on 3rd February the First Sea Lord, in a signal to the British Admiralty Delegation at Washington, pointed this out and remarked: "It is impossible for us to make our own arrangements for reinforcement without this information." Meanwhile Washington took a hand, and on 29th January Admiral Royle told the War Cabinet that the Chiefs of Staff there had asked that *Perth* should be allotted to the ABDA Area as soon as possible. The Naval Board had intended to retain *Perth* in the Anzac Area until *Canberra* (allotted to that area) had completed her refit; but in view of the Washington request Royle now recommended that she be sent to the ABDA Area at once, and this was approved by the War Cabinet. The Australian Squadron, *Australia* (flag), and *Perth*, with *Leander*, left Sydney on 31st January, *Australia* and *Leander* for Wellington and the formation of the Anzac Squadron, and *Perth* for Fremantle, thence to escort convoy "MS.4" to the ABDA Area.

At the end of January there was a change in command in the American naval forces in ABDA. Hitherto Admiral Hart had remained in command of the Asiatic Fleet while at the same time holding the appointment of Abdafloat; but on 30th January Glassford was promoted to Vice-Admiral and ordered to assume command of U.S. naval forces in the South-West Pacific, and five days later Hart was relieved of his duties as Commander-in-Chief Asiatic Fleet, and left free to concentrate on those of Abdafloat. As such he was now in a position to form a combined striking force. On 28th January the British military command in Malaya decided to withdraw from the mainland to Singapore Island. On the 30th the Singapore naval dockyard closed down, and all base area was handed over to the military authorities for defence. Withdrawal to Singapore Island was completed during the night of 30th-31st January, and the causeway was breached. Singapore entered a state of siege. Japanese aircraft were ranging farther afield into Bahka Strait and the more southerly approaches to Singapore; and convoy "BM.12", then approaching Sunda Strait, was to be the last convoy into Singapore. This change in defence plans released for offensive operations a number of British and Dutch ships hitherto engaged on convoy escort work; and at a conference with Admiral Helfrich and Commodore Collins at his headquarters at Lembang on 2nd February, Hart arranged for the immediate formation of a Combined Striking Force of American and Dutch ships, to be commanded by the Dutch Rear-Admiral Doorman. Additions would be made to it as British ships—including *Perth*—became available.

The Allied forces were, at the time, dispersed. *Java*, *Tromp*, and two Dutch destroyers had been in Karimata Strait, unsuccessfully trying to

intercept a Japanese force carrying out a landing north of Pontianak, on the west coast of Borneo. Subsequently *Tromp* proceeded to Surabaya, but *Java* joined the escort of convoy "BM.12", already including *Exeter*, *Danae*, and other British ships. *Hobart* was in the Singapore area. A striking force was, however, hastily assembled in Bunder Road, at Madura, the island lying off Surabaya. It consisted of *De Ruyter* (flag of Rear-Admiral Doorman), *Houston*, *Marblehead*, and *Tromp*; the American destroyers *Stewart*, *John D. Edwards*, *Barker* and *Bulmer*; and the Dutch *Van Ghent*,⁹ *Piet Hein*, and *Banckert*. Allied air reconnaissance reported an enemy concentration of three cruisers, ten destroyers and twenty transports at Balikpapan, presumably preparing for an advance down Macassar Strait either on Bandjermasin in Borneo, or Macassar in Celebes. Doorman was to try to smash this concentration.

By this time the Americans had concluded that Darwin was unsuitable as a base, and had ordered a number of auxiliaries from the Australian port to Tjilatjap.¹ The destroyer tender *Black Hawk*, the submarine tenders *Holland* and *Otus*,² and the oiler *Trinity*, escorted by *Alden* and *Edsall*, sailed from Darwin on 3rd February. That day the Japanese made their first air raid on Surabaya—fruit of their possession of the airfield at Kendari—with twenty-six bombers escorted by fighters, and did considerable damage to the town. They also raided the inland towns of Malang and Madiun, damaging the airfields and destroying grounded aircraft.

The Japanese aircraft bound for Surabaya passed over the Allied striking force in Bunder Road on the afternoon of 3rd February. Doorman thus knew that he was sighted, and that any element of surprise attaching to his mission was probably lost. He sailed from Bunder Road at midnight, and led his force eastwards, to pass south of Kangean Island some 200 miles east of Surabaya, before turning north for Macassar Strait. This course was on the direct air line between Kendari and Surabaya, which the Japanese had followed on their previous day's attacks on Java. Daylight on the 4th found the striking force zigzagging over a moderate following sea raised by a gentle wind. There were scattered clouds but good visibility, and the high land of Kangean Island could be seen to the north, and the distant peaks of Bali and Lombok islands on the other beam when, at 9.49 a.m. four formations, each of nine Japanese bombers, appeared from the east. The task force scattered (the value of concentrated anti-aircraft fire was not at that time appreciated by the inexperienced Dutch and Americans) and from then until around midday were

⁹ *Van Ghent*, Dutch destroyer (1927), 1,310 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; wrecked on Lima Island, Java Sea, 15 Feb 1942.

¹ Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. III (1948), *The Rising Sun in the Pacific*, p. 298. But Admiral King, *Our Navy at War* (1944), p. 28, writing of Darwin prior to 19 Feb 1942, says: "Most of our forces basing there had been transferred to Tjilatjap because Darwin, not entirely suitable from the beginning, was becoming untenable." Apparently the Americans apprehended air attacks on Darwin, where the depth of water would make the tenders total losses if they were sunk there. The submarines were the primary concern, and this combination of factors led to the decision to remove the tenders.

² *Black Hawk*, US destroyer tender (1917), 5,600 tons, four 5-in guns, 13 kts.

Holland, US submarine tender (1926), 8,100 tons, eight 5-in guns, one 21-in torp tube, 16 kts.
Otus, US submarine tender (1940), 6,750 tons, four 5-in guns, 14 kts.

the targets for successive attacks by the aircraft, the cruisers being the main objects of attention. Heaviest sufferers were *Marblehead* and *Houston*, the first named so badly damaged that, after temporary patching at Tjilatjap, she was sent via Trincomalee and Simonstown, to the United States for repair. *Houston* lost her after turret with its three 8-inch guns, as the result of an explosion following a bomb hit, but she remained effective. She suffered sixty killed, and the *Marblehead* fifteen, and both ships had many wounded, some seriously. It was a Japanese victory, but not as decisive as was believed by the enemy airmen, who claimed to have sunk two cruisers and damaged two more. After the action the force steamed southwards through Lombok Strait, and the American ships and *Tromp* went to Tjilatjap, where *Houston* and the Dutch cruiser arrived on 5th February, and *Marblehead* on the next day; while Doorman, having seen them clear of the danger area, continued with *De Ruyter* and the Dutch destroyers westwards, south about Java to Batavia.

The first essay of the Combined Striking Force was not a happy one. Considering the distance of Balikpapan from Surabaya—some 500 miles—the hazards of taking a surface force without air cover on such a mission were obvious, since some of the passage would have to be made in daylight over waters under enemy air control. Those hazards being accepted, the timing of sailing, and route taken, would appear to have been ill chosen. Morison, the American naval historian, implied Doorman's responsibility for the idea of the operation when he wrote: "Rear-Admiral Doorman, who had already assumed active command of the Combined Striking Force, had plans for a try at Macassar Strait."³

On the other hand, Admiral Helfrich, in unpublished notes written after the war, said that Doorman told him that "he didn't understand why he got orders to proceed for an attack on Balikpapan—a long way—without air protection and after being sighted the last day before". Helfrich could not understand why Doorman took the route he did, nor knew who chose the route. "In my opinion he should have gone through Sapudi Strait [along the east coast of Madura Island] up north immediately." Hart was indignant about Doorman's retirement to Batavia, and "thought seriously of relieving this cautious commander but decided not to do so because the Netherlands, fighting for their own soil, would feel slighted if not represented in the high command".⁴ "What could Doorman have done else?" asked Helfrich in his post war notes. "He told me later it never was his intention to *stay* in the Indian Ocean. It was part of the 'hit and run' tactics, which I had ordered, before Hart arrived, as the only method to operate against a superior enemy, without air cover."

Hart ordered Doorman to Tjilatjap, where they met on 8th February. There was then news of an enemy convoy from the Molucca Sea rounding the south-east corner of Celebes, and Hart told Doorman to attack it. Doorman sailed—on the 8th—with *De Ruyter*, *Tromp*, and two destroyers.

³ Morison, p. 299.

⁴ Morison, p. 305.

Houston remained at Tjilatjap until the 10th, when she was sailed to Darwin, thus denying Doorman his most powerful unit at that time. But it was in any case then too late for a surface attack on the Japanese convoy. As Doorman sailed from Tjilatjap at midnight on the 8th, the enemy force was anchoring at its destination—Macassar; which town, with the adjacent Maros airfield, was occupied by nightfall on the 9th. Doorman's orders were thereupon changed, and he was told to wait south of Sumbawa for further instructions.

It was, for Doorman, the beginning of three weeks of frustrating, "too weak and too late", fruitless attempts to check the Japanese flood. They were weeks in which the resemblance of the Allied naval situation to that of the British in the naval defence of Crete became increasingly marked. But the weight against Doorman was greater than that against the British admirals in the Aegean. Their material strength had been much greater than his; but he had not only, like them, to contend against overwhelming air power, but against vastly superior surface power too. Nor was this his main handicap. The British in the Mediterranean had the strength of complete and mutual confidence between Commander-in-Chief and force commanders; confidence based on their common heritage of a long tradition, and sound peacetime training capped by active war experience gained in many enemy encounters. It was such that they could almost read each others' minds and divine each others' intentions. There was no such mutual confidence between Hart and Doorman, nor between Hart and Helfrich. For Hart, 64 years old, the command was an unsought and heavy—apparently too heavy⁵—responsibility. His was not inspired leadership for the Dutch; and the record of the period is one of unhappy dissensions between them. The British in the area, hitherto pre-occupied with the escort of Singapore convoys in the west, had experienced little contact with Hart, or with the American forces operating east of the Borneo-Bali line. Their relations with the Dutch were, however, close and happy; and the British officers got on well with Doorman.

But that was not enough. Ships and men had not trained or exercised together, and time did not permit this to be rectified. In such a vital factor as communications, the difficulties were such as seriously to reduce efficiency. Visual signalling was restricted to simple signals in English by flashing lamp in Morse code through the agency of a translator and of British or American liaison officers with small signal staffs in the Dutch ships. For that reason, tactically the ships of the Combined Striking Force were capable of little more than following each other in line ahead. When the British, operating with stronger, well-trained and experienced homogeneous forces against lesser opposition, were unable to succeed in the battle for Crete, it was unlikely that Doorman, with his unintegrated,

⁵ "The Admiral [Hart] himself told the Governor-General [of the Netherlands East Indies] and me more than once that he felt himself 'too old' for this job. He even introduced himself with the same words to me and to the Governor-General at the first meeting at Batavia on Jan 3rd 1942, thus even before General Wavell arrived." Helfrich in his unpublished notes.

"Admiral Hart had arrived in Java tired and ill, and he told Admiral Layton that his appointment was not of his seeking and little to his liking. What he wanted was a rest." Russell Grenfell, *Main Fleet to Singapore* (1951), p. 155.

untrained groups, would have better fortune in the defence of the Netherlands East Indies, even with the change of over-all naval command which shortly occurred with the relief of Hart as Abdafloat. The formation of a striking force had been too long delayed; and whatever chances it might have had, had been lost with the swift passage of time and the establishment of advance enemy air bases. Doorman, and the ships and men he commanded, were now the victims of circumstance of which the outcome was already and inevitably decided.

The Japanese force which took Macassar was that of the Sasebo marines which had previously taken Menado and Kendari, and which left Kendari on 6th February in six transports. Takagi's *5th Cruiser Squadron* (less *Myoko*) provided cover, and air and anti-submarine support were given by *Chitose* and *Mizuho* of the *11th Seaplane Tender Division*, and *Sanuki Maru*. Escort was by *Nagara*, with units of Kubo's *1st Base Force* and destroyers of the *8th*, *15th* and *21st Divisions*, augmented by four destroyers from Balikpapan for close support at the landings. Although it was too late for Doorman to intervene, there was a successful Allied attack at this operation when, as the Japanese force entered the anchorage at Macassar shortly before midnight on the 8th, the destroyer *Natsushio*,⁶ of the *15th Division*, was torpedoed and sunk by the U.S. submarine *S 37*.⁷ Japanese landings began at dawn on the 9th. The small Dutch garrison could offer little opposition, and by nightfall that day the Japanese were in occupation. The next day Japanese army units which had moved down the coast of Borneo from Balikpapan by barge and small craft, and then struck overland through mountainous jungle, took the south coast town and airfield of Bandjermasin against slight opposition. The stage was being set for the assault on eastern Java.

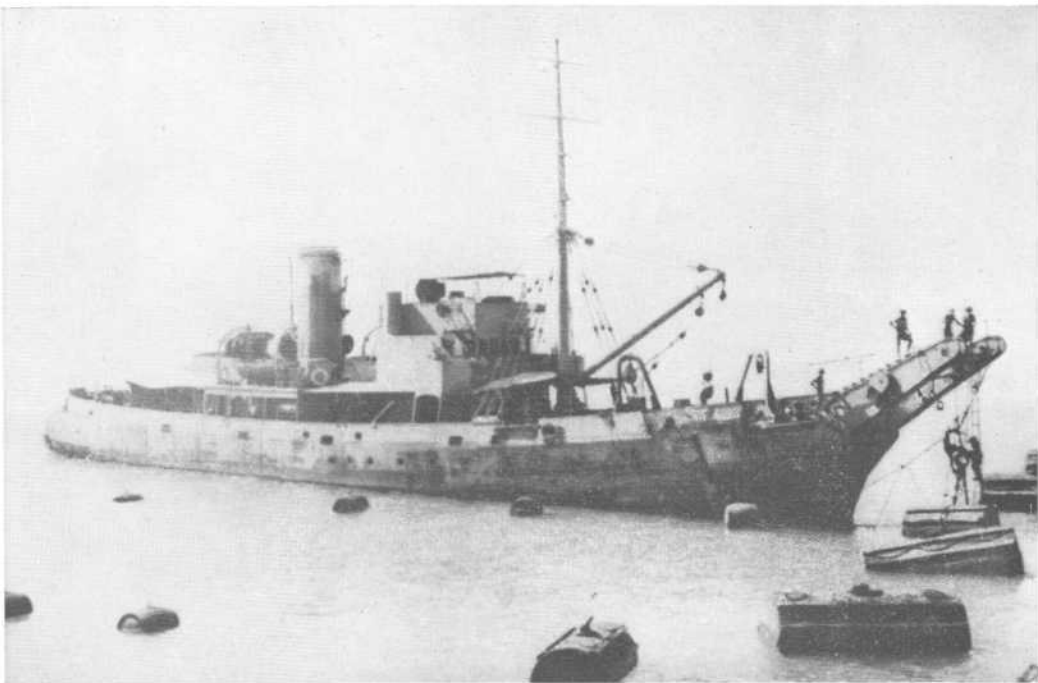
XI

By this time Japanese preparations for an assault on Java from the west were also well forward, and indeed, on the day they landed at Macassar, in the east—the 9th February—the advanced force for the assault on Banka Island in the west—as a preliminary to that on Sumatra—sailed from Camranh Bay, Indo-China. The Japanese army and navy air forces had at this stage gained almost complete air supremacy in the Malay area and neighbouring seas, having gradually extended their control with the capture of strategic airfields, as they had done in the east of the ABDA Area. It will be recalled that on the 25th December 1941, the enemy captured Kuching with its airfield in British Borneo. On the 4th January they captured Kuantan and its airfield in Malaya; and on the 27th of the month secured Sinkawang II airfield in Dutch Borneo. The day before this, on the 26th January, a Japanese convoy of two transports, escorted by the light cruiser *Sendai*; destroyers of the *3rd Squadron*; and smaller craft,⁸

⁶ *Natsushio*, Japanese destroyer (1940), 1,900 tons, six 5-in guns, eight 24-in torp tubes, 36 kts.

⁷ *S 37*, US submarine (1923), 800 tons, one 3-in gun, four 21-in torp tubes, 14.5 kts.

⁸ The convoy in its approach stages was apparently covered by a force including ships of the *7th Cruiser Squadron* and *4th Carrier Division*. It was sighted by reconnaissance aircraft from Singapore at 7.45 a.m. on 26 January when, according to a British official account, it consisted of four cruisers, one aircraft carrier, six destroyers, two transports, and 13 smaller craft.



Boom Working Vessel, Darwin.

(Department of Information)

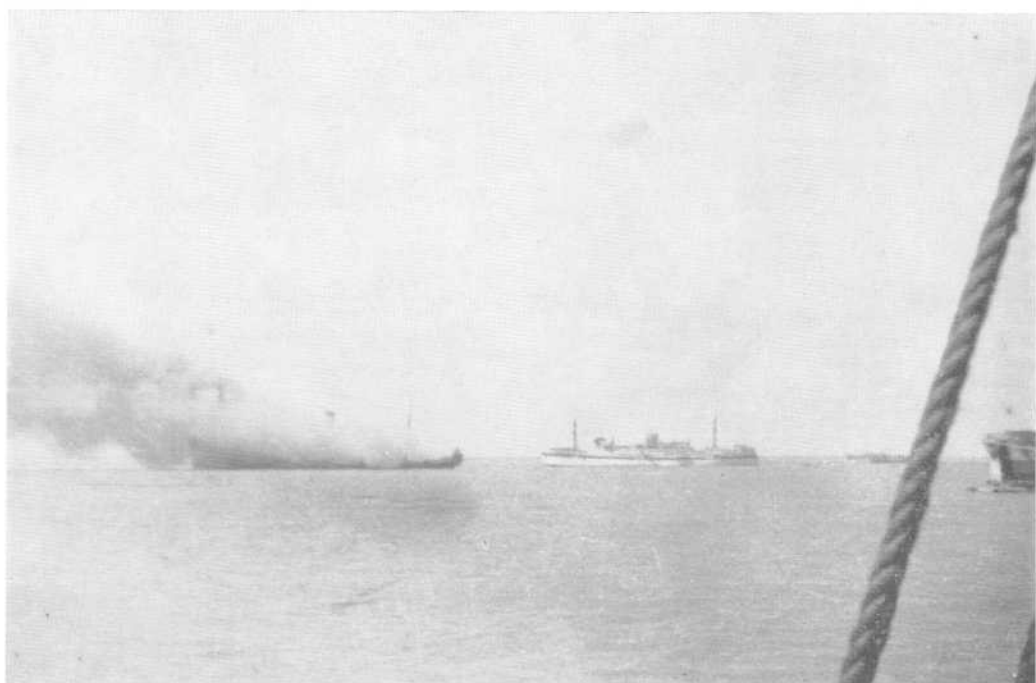


H.M.A.S. *Vendetta* in tow of H.M.A.S. *Ping Wo*, March 1942.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



(Chief ERA H. J. Elliott, R.A.N.)
H.M.A.S. *Perth*, taken from H.M.A.S. *Adelaide*, 15th February 1942.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)
Darwin 19th February 1942. Transport *Zealandia* on fire; Hospital Ship *Manunda* in background.

arrived at Endau, some 80 miles due north of Singapore. The transports carried part of the 96th Airfield Battalion with stores, equipment, petrol and bombs for the Kahang and Kluang airfields, the next objective of the Japanese in their southward drive in Malaya.

During the afternoon of the 26th January aircraft from Singapore attacked the convoy, and troops in barges and on the beaches. Direct hits were made on the two transports and a cruiser; but the attackers lost 13 of their 68 participating aircraft, with others badly damaged. At this time the destroyers H.M.A.S. *Vampire* and H.M.S. *Thanet* were in Singapore naval base, where they had arrived on the 24th January after escorting convoy "MS.2A" from Ratai Bay. They were ordered to attack the Japanese concentration at Endau, and left Singapore at 4.30 p.m. on the 26th. The two ships steamed northwards, adjusting speed so as to arrive off Endau after moonset; and shortly before 2 a.m. on the 27th Moran, *Vampire's* commanding officer, with *Thanet* two cables astern, led in at 15 knots towards Endau with the dark bulk of Pulau Tioman (an island some 25 miles off shore) as a concealing background.

Japanese ships at Endau at the time, additional to the two transports, were *Sendai*; the destroyers *Hatsuyuki*, *Shirayuki*, *Fubuki*, *Yugiri*, *Asagiri* and *Amagiri*;⁹ five minesweepers of No. 1 Minesweeping Group; and about six other small craft. At 2.37 a.m. *Vampire* sighted a vessel, believed to be a destroyer, on the starboard bow. *Vampire* was apparently not sighted, and accordingly left this ship in the hope of finding a concentration farther in; and three minutes later she sighted what seemed to be a second destroyer "right ahead and close". Moran altered to port, passed about 600 yards off, and fired two of his three torpedoes. Both missed. According to the Japanese report this ship was the minesweeper No. 4,¹ patrolling outside the anchorage, and she at once gave the alarm. Meanwhile *Vampire* and *Thanet* lost the two Japanese ships in the darkness and continued in some seven or eight miles towards Endau until 3.13 a.m. when, having failed to sight any concentration, Moran altered course to S.E. by E. with *Thanet* following, and increased to full speed.

At 3.18 *Vampire* sighted a destroyer on the port bow. Moran told *Thanet* to alter course to starboard and fire her torpedoes. *Vampire* herself fired her one remaining torpedo, and again missed. This destroyer was apparently *Shirayuki*, closely followed by *Yugiri* while, according to the Japanese story, "soon afterwards No. 1² minesweeper, *Sendai*, *Fubuki* and *Asagiri* also joined in the fight". There followed a brief, confused mêlée, with *Vampire* and *Thanet* retiring S.E. by E. at full speed and both sides engaging with gun fire. At about 4 a.m. *Thanet* was hit. "Great clouds of black smoke issued from her," recorded Moran, who tried to cover her withdrawal with a smoke screen. But the British ship was disabled

⁹ Japanese destroyers (1928-30), 1,700 tons, six 5-in guns, nine 24-in torp tubes, 34 kts; all sunk between Aug 1942 and Apr 1944.

¹ Japanese minesweeper (1924), 615 tons, two 4.7-in guns, 20 kts.

² Japanese minesweeper (1923), 615 tons, two 4.7-in guns, 20 kts; sunk 9 Aug 1945.

and stopped, and was last seen by *Vampire*, her guns silent, with a pronounced list to starboard and smoking heavily. Moran believed he scored two shell hits on a destroyer during the mêlée; and that the Japanese ships engaged and damaged each other in the confusion. The Japanese, however, claim that they came off scatheless. *Thanet* sank at about 4.20 a.m. on the 27th January 1942. *Vampire*, which suffered no damage or casualties, made good her escape, and reached the Singapore naval base at 10 o'clock that morning.

Vampire's period in the ABDA Area was coming to a close. On the 28th January she left Singapore escorting a convoy to Sunda Strait with *Yarra*. The ships withstood an enemy air attack at the northern entrance to Banka Strait without damage, and on the 30th *Vampire*, relieved by H.M.I.S. *Sutlej*, proceeded to Batavia. She left there on the 1st February with *Exeter* and *Jupiter*, escorting the U.S. transports *West Point* (26,454 tons) and *Manhattan* (24,289 tons) through Sunda Strait, after which *Vampire* formed part of escort of convoy "DM.2" from Sunda Strait to Batavia. On the 5th February she finally sailed from Batavia, escorting the merchant ships *Melchior Treub* (3,242 tons), and *Ophir* (4,115 tons) to Colombo, which port was reached on the 11th February. *Vampire* had seen her last of the ABDA Area, and now joined the East Indies Station.

XII

The early days of February 1942 saw the start of various widely dispersed but related ship movements in the ABDA Area and adjacent waters. Some convoys were still making across the Indian Ocean for the area, but with the continued southward advance of the Japanese the tide was beginning to set strongly in the other direction. Indeed once again the resemblance to happenings ten months earlier in the Aegean became marked. As in April 1941, during the British withdrawal from Greece, Suda Bay in Crete became cluttered with ships, and their dispatch to the Mediterranean an urgent call on Pridham-Wippell there, so in February 1942 the congestion at Batavia with ships escaping from Singapore, or diverted from there to Java because of the depreciating situation, became of serious concern to Commodore Collins, and their dispersal through Sunda Strait east to Australia or west to Colombo a pressing problem. As in the Aegean, so in the South China Sea enemy bombing (and later surface attack) increasingly added to the trials of the withdrawing ships and their escorts. From the beginning of the month there was a steady exodus from Singapore. On the 2nd February H.M.A.S. *Maryborough* left there escorting H.M. Ships *Circe*,³ *Medusa*,⁴ and motor minesweeper *No. 51*⁵ to Batavia. H.M.A.S. *Vendetta* (which was immobilised, having been in dockyard hands with a major refit) also left on the 2nd in tow of *Stronghold*, and in the evening of that day *Hobart* and *Tenedos* sailed

³ HMS *Circe*, minesweeper (1912), 778 tons, one 4-in gun.

⁴ HMS *Medusa*, minelayer (1915), 535 tons, 52 mines, 10 kts.

⁵ Motor minesweeper *No. 51* (1941), 226 tons, one 3-pdr gun; sunk, south of Java, 4 Mar 1942.

for Batavia, outstripping these smaller and slower fry en route. Shortly after noon on the 3rd, in the northern leg of Banka Strait, *Hobart* saw three aircraft bombing the merchant ship *Norah Moller* (4,433 tons). She and *Tenedos* turned towards at high speed and the aircraft, after a fruitless attack on *Hobart*, flew off. *Norah Moller*, hit amidships, was on fire, with her engines out of action. *Hobart* took off her wounded and passengers—a total of 57 including women and children. The remaining 13 of *Norah Moller's* company were picked up by *Tenedos*, and the ship herself, anchored, abandoned and on fire, was left. Of those rescued by *Hobart*, 28 were wounded, and six died on passage to Tanjong Priok, which was reached on the 4th.

Of the Australian ships of the 21st Minesweeping Group, *Maryborough*, as stated above, left Singapore for Java on the 2nd February. *Goulburn* and *Burnie* were already based on Tanjong Priok. They left Singapore on the 25th January, detailed for sweeping the southern half of Banka Strait. They swept en route, and reached Batavia on the 30th, finding “both inner and outer anchorages greatly congested owing to large number of ships arriving”. On the 3rd February *Ballarat* and *Toowoomba*—detailed for sweeping the northern half of Banka Strait to Berhala Strait—left Singapore for Palembang, in company with two small local minesweepers, H.M. Ships *Gemas*⁶ and *Rahman*.⁷ On passage they were diverted to help the merchant ship *Loch Ranza* (4,958 tons) which, carrying important radar sets, wireless telegraphy transmitters, and anti-aircraft guns for the defence of Palembang, had been bombed and was aground and on fire at the north-east end of Abang Island, in Rhio Strait. *Toowoomba* rescued the crew and recovered some of the gear. On their passage south through Berhala Strait the two corvettes were bombed heavily by five Japanese aircraft, but the enemy were repulsed by gun fire, and the ships escaped with slight damage suffered by *Toowoomba*, and reached Palembang on the 6th.

That day the Rear-Admiral Malaya (Rear-Admiral Spooner⁸) in Singapore deputed his minesweeping officer (Commander Farquharson⁹) to leave in *Wollongong*, take *Bendigo* in company, close Abang Island, and search for *Loch Ranza's* crew;¹ and take every step completely to destroy the radar sets and wireless transmitters. *Bendigo* left Singapore at 9.20 p.m. on the 6th to act as a lightship for an outgoing convoy at the northern end of Durian Strait. *Wollongong* sailed at midnight on the 6th, and was thus the last Australian warship to leave Singapore before the surrender. She picked up *Bendigo* at 1 a.m. on the 7th, and the two ships

⁶ HMS *Gemas* (1925), 207 tons; scuttled at Tjilatjap, 3 Mar 1942.

⁷ HMS *Rahman* (1926), 209 tons; lost at Batavia, 1 Mar 1942.

⁸ Vice-Adm E. J. Spooner, DSO; RN. (HMS *Calliope* 1916-18.) Comd HMS *Vindictive* 1937-38, HMS *Repulse* 1938-40, Rear-Adm, Malaya, 1941. B. 22 Aug 1887. Died on Tjebia Island, 15 Apr 1942.

⁹ Cdr E. R. A. Farquharson; RN. (HMS's *Pyramus* 1914-16, *Concordon* 1916-18.) SO 9 Mine-sweeping Flotilla 1941; cdr minesweepers, Singapore 1941-42; comd HMS *Athene* 1942-43. B. 9 Jun 1893.

¹ *Toowoomba's* signal saying that *Loch Ranza's* crew had already been rescued apparently never got through.

closed Abang Island at daylight that day, to find *Loch Ranza*, with her bow on a reef, submerged up to the foremast and completely burnt out. In the afternoon of the 11th, after a stealthy passage down the coast of Sumatra, and hiding from enemy aircraft at intervals in various bays and inlets, the two ships joined *Ballarat* and *Toowoomba* at Palembang.

XIII

A week after Japan entered the war, Mr Churchill, then in the new battleship *Duke of York* on his way across the Atlantic to confer with the President of the United States, in a radio message to London asked the British Chiefs of Staff to "consider with Auchinleck² and Commonwealth Government moving 1st [i.e. 6th] Australian Division from Palestine to Singapore". On Christmas Day, then a guest at the White House, Washington, he summarised his views on the Far Eastern situation in a cable to Mr Curtin, and referred to his suggestion that "you recall one Australian division from Palestine either into India to replace other troops sent forward or go direct, if it can be arranged, to Singapore". Within a few days this suggestion had resolved into agreement by the Australian Government that the 6th and 7th Divisions should be transferred from the Middle East to the Netherlands East Indies, together with corps troops and maintenance and base organisations. In approving this move at a meeting on the 5th January, the War Cabinet laid down that "adequate measures should be taken for their security both in respect of naval escort and protection when approaching destination".

The move was a striking illustration of the value of control of the wider seas and oceans in a world-wide naval war. During February, March and April, in the "Stepsister" movement, over seventy ships, loaded with troops and equipment, were spread over the Indian Ocean between the Middle and Far East, and about 64,000 troops were transported. The ships varied between large fast transports such as the British *Andes* and *Strathallan*, the Dutch *Nieuw Amsterdam*, and the American *Mount Vernon* and *West Point*, each carrying from 3,000 to 5,000 troops, to slower and smaller vessels loaded with equipment and motor transport and carrying only about 200 troops.

Ours was not a luxury liner (recalled a soldier who travelled in one of these smaller ships). It was a glorified sort of tramp, and we were the aft gun crew. Bang went our visions of hot and cold water, gadgets for producing stewards, and spring beds. Weeks went by, and each day seemed longer and more monotonous than the previous one. "Bully 'n biscuits" comprised the main diet. Rats gnawed the tongues of our boots. Cockroaches pranced, route-marched, and did the polka in every corner and crevice. The only water on the ship was highly chlorinated.³

To an extent the system developed in the west-bound US convoy days was followed. There was a certain amount of swift carriage from Egypt to Bombay with transhipment there. There were some convoys of the

² Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, GCB, GCIE, CSI, DSO, OBE. C-in-C India 1941, 1943-46; C-in-C ME 1941-42. Regular soldier; b. 21 Jun 1884.

³ VX16838 Sgt H. J. Hale, "Decontamination" in *Soldiering On* (1942), p. 130.

larger troop transports, but generally the equipment and motor transport ships sailed independently after being escorted through focal areas. Colombo came prominently into the picture as a refuelling and assembly port.

The first of the convoys, "JS.1",⁴ reached Colombo at the end of January. It was of eight ships, *Adrastus* (7,905 tons); *Prominent* (2,232); *Filleigh* (4,856); *Modasa* (9,070); *Yoma* (8,139); *Lulworth Hill* (7,628); *Hai Lee* (3,616); and *Hermion* (5,202) and carried troops and equipment of the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion and the 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion. "JS.1" left Colombo for the ABDA Area on the 3rd February with H.M.S. *Cornwall* as ocean escort and the Australian corvettes *Bathurst* and *Lismore* providing local anti-submarine protection. (The corvettes left "JS.1" on the 5th February, to meet and provide anti-submarine screen for the battleship *Royal Sovereign* and the netlayer *Guardian*,⁵ which that day left Addu Atoll for Trincomalee.)

On the day "JS.1" left Colombo, the 3rd February, convoy "BM.12", the last to carry reinforcements to Singapore, was passing through Sunda Strait north bound. By this time the imminence of a Japanese attack on southern Sumatra was clear. Enemy aircraft were making daily reconnaissance flights over Banka Island and Palembang; air attacks on Allied convoys in Banka Strait and on airfields in Sumatra increased; and reports were received of a Japanese airborne division concentrating at Camranh Bay,⁶ and of an enemy naval force assembling at the Anambas and Natuna Islands, believed to be for an attack on Banka Island.

Sumatra, an island just over 1,000 miles long, and some 230 miles at its greatest width where it is bisected by the equator, lies with its long axis roughly north-west to south-east, and with its northern half almost parallel to the Malay Peninsula, from which it is separated by the Malacca Strait, some thirty miles wide at its narrowest. Economically (and at this stage strategically also) its chief importance lay in the south, where were rich oil fields and refineries, and airfields, near Palembang. Palembang lies fifty miles up the Musi River which, dividing below the town into a number of channels, one of which was navigable to ocean-going vessels, flows through mangrove and swamp to empty into the northern leg of Banka Strait. The two airfields were Palembang I, about ten miles north of the city, and Palembang II, about thirty-five miles south-west of Palembang. Early in January 1942, arrangements were made with Major-General ter Poorten, Commander-in-Chief of the Netherlands East Indies Army, for the British to use the airfields and provide anti-aircraft artillery.

⁴ The convoys from the Middle East intended for the Netherlands East Indies were originally designated "JS". But with the deterioration in the situation, and the fall of the Netherlands East Indies, there was considerable rearranging of the convoys at Colombo, and most of them sailed thence—to Australia—as "SU" convoys.

⁵ HMS *Guardian*, netlayer (1933), 2,860 tons, two 4-in guns, 18 kts.

⁶ It was subsequently learned from Japanese sources that the Japanese assault on southern Sumatra had been planned for the 10th February, using Ledo airfield on Borneo as the air base. This field could not be prepared in time, and the air base was changed to Kuching in Borneo and Kuantan on the Malay Peninsula. The Palembang operation was accordingly deferred to the 15th February.

It had been hoped to send an Indian brigade group to strengthen the inadequate Dutch garrison concentrated for the defence of the Palembang area, but the rapid Japanese advance in Malaya precluded this. Now that no more reinforcements could be landed at Singapore, General Wavell decided that the first Australian division to arrive should be used in Sumatra, and the second division in Java. Advanced parties of the Australian Corps in convoy "JS.1" (and in "JS.2", also on the way) would be the first of these Australians to arrive in Sumatra. Meanwhile British air squadrons from Malaya had established themselves at Palembang, whence they had continued their support of the army in Malaya and given such protection as they could to convoys traversing Sunda and Banka Straits; and heavy and light anti-aircraft artillery for the airfields was sent from Singapore. Six 3.7-inch guns and a number of light guns reached Palembang on the 30th January. Unfortunately little ammunition arrived with them, and in the intensive bombing by the Japanese of ships in Durian and Berhala Straits the ammunition ship *Katong* (1,461 tons) was sunk, and the *Subadar* (5,424 tons)—loaded with 3.7-inch ammunition and more guns—was beached in Berhala Strait. She subsequently refloated and continued her voyage, but did not reach Palembang until the 11th February.

Again the time problem between Japanese advance and reinforcements' arrival became of first importance. To try and steal a few days, Wavell asked ter Poorten to send two Netherlands East Indies battalions from Java to strengthen the garrison of southern Sumatra. They left Tanjong Priok in two transports, escorted by *Java*, on the 5th February. One battalion went to Palembang; and the other, despite the lateness of the hour and the earlier illustrations of the inability of a small garrison to hold an island against attack by an enemy with control of its approaches, was used to reinforce Banka and Billiton islands. (Admiral Helfrich objected. "I protested to General ter Poorten," he recorded after the war, "no use. When, later, the Japanese did not attack Billiton, the battalion had to be taken back to Java suddenly. On their way back in a ship [*Sloet van de Beele*] escorted by a destroyer [*Van Nes*] I lost the ship, the destroyer, and the battalion by a Japanese air attack." That was on the 17th February.)

The transport of the Dutch reinforcements was covered by a sweep to the north of Banka by a small British force. *Hobart*, with survivors she had rescued from *Norah Moller*, reached Tanjong Priok on the 4th February, and at 6.14 p.m. the same day sailed again under orders from Commodore Collins to join *Exeter*, *Jupiter*, and *Encounter* (the two first-named from escorting convoy "BM.12") in the northern entrance to Banka Strait, and search for enemy forces north of Banka Island. *Hobart* steamed north through Banka Strait, met the other three ships at 7.48 a.m. on the 5th, and the force rounded Banka Island, closed Klabat Bay, the deep indentation on the north coast, and returned via Gaspar Strait between Banka and Billiton islands, to Tanjong Priok, where it arrived at 7 a.m. on the 6th. No enemy surface forces were sighted, but while north of

Banka Island, around midday on the 5th, the ships suffered three separate high-level bombing attacks. *Hobart* was near-missed, but without damage. Her captain, Howden, noted that

bombs from Japanese high-level attacks have not the noisy shriek common to German or Italian bombs. Rather does their noise somewhat resemble that by no means unpleasant sound made by the transfer of soda water from a siphon to a glass.

He observed, nevertheless, that their accuracy appeared more deadly, and the explosive effect more powerful, than those of the German and Italian bombs.

On the 6th, the day the force returned to Tanjong Priok, Allied reconnaissance aircraft from Palembang sighted one enemy cruiser, four destroyers and four transports at the Anambas Islands. General Wavell concluded that southern Sumatra was the probable objective of this force.⁷ Dutch submarines were disposed to counter the anticipated move, *K 11* and *K 12* in the vicinity of Klabat Bay; *K 14* to patrol the line Anambas-Banka; and *K 15* to the southern entrance of Karimata Strait, between Billiton and Borneo. Ineffectual air attacks were made on the enemy concentration on the nights of the 8th-9th and 11th-12th February.

Meanwhile, on the 9th the advance force of the Japanese *38th Division*, in eight transports escorted by the light cruiser *Sendai* and destroyers, left Camranh Bay for Banka Island. The next day Vice-Admiral Ozawa in *Chokai*, with the *7th Cruiser Squadron*, *Kumano*, *Mogami*, *Mikuma* and *Suzuya*; light cruiser *Yura*, and destroyers; and the *4th Carrier Division*, *Ryujo*, left Camranh Bay for the area north of Banka Island to cover the operation. On the 11th February the main body of the invasion force, in fourteen transports escorted by the light cruiser *Kashii*, with destroyers and smaller craft, left Camranh Bay for Palembang. Two days later an Allied reconnaissance aircraft sent to reconnoitre the Anambas Islands reported that the Japanese concentration there had left, and that enemy invasion convoys had been sighted north of Banka Island, moving towards the strait.

XIV

These were fateful days on that 600-mile stretch of water from the Indian Ocean outside Sunda Strait to Singapore, where the ebb in Allied fortunes was reaching full tide, and the flow set to the southwards as ships sought to escape in the shortening time remaining. On the 6th February *Danae*, *Sutlej* and *Yarra* left Singapore escorting convoy "E.M.U.", consisting of *Devonshire* and *Felix Roussel* for India, and *City of Canterbury* for Batavia. These ships had arrived only the previous day in convoy "BM.12A". *Devonshire* and *Felix Roussel* now carried large numbers of women and children refugees for Bombay. On the 7th *Hobart* and *Electra* left Batavia to relieve *Danae* and *Sutlej* and escort the convoy through Sunda Strait. By this time shipping congestion at Tanjong Priok

⁷ It was probably marking time there as a result of the five days' delay in launching the Palembang operation.

was acute, and many ships had to anchor outside the breakwater. Though they there had the protection of minefields, Collins, on the 5th February, instituted a continuous anti-submarine patrol which, started with H.M.A. Ships *Goulburn* and *Burnie*, was maintained until the eve of the invasion of Java.

At this stage General Wavell was still optimistic. Reviewing the situation on the 6th February, the Joint Staff Mission in Washington gave the opinion that "the forces available now or in the near future in this area cannot hope to stem the Japanese advance, far less pass to the offensive, until we have achieved air superiority". Wavell, however, thought the Japanese must be having difficulty in maintaining their air effort, and on the 7th February expressed the view that "if all our reinforcements come to hand without delay we shall get on top before long". But that night the Japanese effected a landing on Pulau Ubin, in the middle of Johore Strait off the north-east point of Singapore Island; and, the next night, made several landings on the north-west coast of the island itself. General Wavell spent twenty-four hours in Singapore from where he returned to Java on the 11th February "without much confidence in any prolonged resistance" (as he recorded in his dispatch); and with the knowledge that "the battle for Singapore is not going well. Japanese, with usual infiltration tactics, are getting on much more rapidly than they should in west of island" (as he that day telegraphed to Churchill). From then on the end came quickly. By 10th February the defenders had no operational aircraft left on the island; the last eight Hurricane fighters had been sent to Palembang. The majority of the troops (including the Australians, who bore the shock of the first Japanese landings on the night of the 8th-9th) fought bravely and well; but there was also, especially among the recently arrived half-trained reinforcements, a decline in discipline and morale. On the 11th February, according to a report by the naval Staff Officer (Intelligence) Singapore, the waterfront at Singapore was "a mass of demoralised troops looking for any means of leaving the island".

On the 8th February *Yarra*, detached from convoy "E.M.U.", arrived in the Palembang River, and left the same day for Batavia in company with *Stronghold* towing *Vendetta*. These two ships, having been repeatedly bombed on their passage south, had put into the mouth of the Palembang River on the 4th. It will be recalled that on the 6th February *Dragon* and *Durban*, with two destroyers, relieved *Canberra* of the escort of convoy "MS.3" off Christmas Island, while the Australian cruiser took over *Warwick Castle* from them and escorted that ship to Australia. The seven tankers of the Palembang section of "MS.3" reached their destination on the 9th February. That day *Hobart*, having escorted *Devonshire* and *Felix Roussel* of convoy "E.M.U." through Sunda Strait, dispersed them to Bombay unescorted, and the next day took over from *Cornwall* the escort of convoy "JS.1", carrying the first flight of the A.I.F. coming from the Middle East to the Netherlands East Indies. Also on that day, the 10th, *Dragon* and her companions from convoy "MS.3" reached Tanjong

Priok, as did also *Stronghold* and *Yarra* with *Vendetta*. Efforts were now being made to send out of Singapore all who could be spared of non-combat, administrative, and key officers and men of the Services, as well as civilians. The ships *Kinta* (1,220 tons) and *Darvel* (1,929 tons) sailed from Singapore on the 9th with 1,000 servicemen for Batavia, including the Australian 2/3rd Reserve Motor Transport Company which provided deck and engine room crews for the *Kinta*, whose crew had deserted in an air raid. On the 10th Rear-Admiral Spooner asked for ships to lift 3,000, mainly airmen, from the island. Thus, immediately on arriving at Batavia *Durban*, in company with *Jupiter*, *Stronghold*, and *Kedah*, sailed for Singapore.

H.M.S. *Kedah* (2,499 tons), one of the ships of the Straits Shipping Company, which had been requisitioned for naval work, was commanded by Commander Sinclair⁸ who knew intimately the South China Sea and approaches to Singapore. The small force left Batavia with *Durban* leading, but the cruiser's captain, Cazalet,¹ told Sinclair: "I want you to take charge and lead us into Singapore. You are the local expert," and it was arranged that *Kedah* should lead from the north end of Durian Strait. Sinclair left in his report a graphic description of the night of 11th-12th February, made fantastic by the demolitions and destruction taking place on the island.

We met it (Sinclair wrote) as we made the Durian Strait. As we got up to the northern end of the minefield a thick haze developed into the thickest oily black smoke I have ever met. One felt that one was eating it, and it tasted oily, greasy. . . . It was a very dark night, no moon and this terrible pall of oily smoke over everything, blowing right down upon us, the wind being N.N.E. force five, smothering everything. Nothing in any way familiarly to be seen, and instead fires and flashes and flares in the most unusual places. Pulau Sambu was burning fiercely, Pulau Sebarok also. . . . I couldn't see Salu. I couldn't see anything. . . .

I was praying now that I hadn't, from my sketchy start from a doubtful fix, thought too much of my 18 knots and too little of the three-and-a-half knot tide sweeping us westwards and northwards; praying that the tail of my line would keep on keeping clear of No. 1 minefield. When, suddenly, fate struck a match the size of an ammunition dump behind the three funnels of *Empress of Asia*, half a point on the port bow, just where she should be. I was right smack on the course up the western end of Selat Sinki. I passed down the line "Look out for the buoy". We actually saw it as we passed it.

Approaching Cyrene Shoal, Bukum was in black silence. The Western Entrance just wasn't there. Not a light in the harbour. The white flashing light was out. Abreast of the north end of Bukum I made "Speed ten knots and take care of the set to the north". Three guns on Blakang Mati fired. I thought "Hell, they've mistaken us for Japs". And up went Pulau Bukum! The rest was easy. It was like daylight now. And there were the Western Heads, lovely and luminous in the fiery glare of heaven knows how many thousand tons of precious fuel and aviation spirit where, a moment before, had been unpredictable black darkness.

⁸ Cdr J. L. Sinclair, DSO, RD; RNR. (HMS's *Newmarket* 1914-15, *Osiris* 1915-18.) Comd HMS *Kedah* 1941-42. Singapore pilot; b. 20 Dec 1889. Died of wounds, at Porlock Harbour, 7 Dec 1942, while serving with RAN.

¹ Vice-Adm Sir Peter Cazalet, KBE, CB, DSO, DSC; RN. (HMS *Princess Royal* 1918.) Comd HMS *Durban* 1941-42, 23 Destroyer Flotilla 1944-45. B. 29 Jul 1899.

The four ships went alongside at Section 10. There was no shore staff to handle lines, and

the wharf was slithery with oil-fuel. Ships had oiled and then thrown the pipe-line ashore. There must have been no staff at the pumping house on the road. Hundreds of feet had trampled it everywhere. The place was littered with abandoned cars, suddenly become valueless. Personal belongings, cherished to the water's edge, that had in the time between one breath and the next suddenly become too much—or too little—to bother about. Quietly standing there amid the wreckage, waiting to embark, was the last of our weaponless Air Force.

It was then about 1.30 a.m. on the 12th February. A few hours earlier in the afternoon of the 11th, *Wollongong* and *Bendigo*, under the command of Commander Farquharson, reached Palembang (as stated above) where were already *Toowoomba* and *Ballarat*. Farquharson had such alarming reports from the Port Captain next morning that he decided to take the four Australian corvettes to sea, and ordered *Toowoomba* and *Ballarat* to raise steam by noon. The four ships, with H.M. Ships *Gemas* and *Rahman*, sailed soon after noon, escorting (at the request of the Dutch authorities) twelve ships to Batavia. *Ballarat* anchored at the mouth of the river, and remained there until 8 a.m. on the 13th, awaiting the arrival of one of the merchant ships. The rest of the convoy cleared the river at 7.45 p.m. on the 12th, and made south through Banka Strait, from which it emerged at daybreak on the 13th.

Banka Strait was crowded with traffic that night. In addition to the corvettes' Palembang convoy (which later swelled to twenty-eight ships), six tankers of the "MS.3" convoy had left Palembang, and a stream of traffic was hurrying south from Singapore. From there had sailed, in these last two days, numerous small craft and, on the night of the 11th-12th, thirteen merchant ships; and *Durban*, *Kedah*, *Jupiter* and *Stronghold* escorting *Empire Star* and *Gorgon*—all six last-named ships and some of the thirteen merchant ships carrying Service personnel.² (The last organised sailing from Singapore was on the night of the 13th-14th February, when a flotilla of small craft carrying some 3,000 Service and civil government personnel sailed. Among them was *ML.310*³, the naval motor launch carrying Rear-Admiral Spooner and Air Vice-Marshal Pulford.)

According to Sinclair's report, *Durban*, *Kedah* and the two destroyers left Singapore at about 3.35 a.m. on the 12th. They had to anchor at the northern end of the swept channel through the Durian Strait minefield, where a light-buoy was missing, and where was "a scatter of shipping that had apparently given up looking for it and had anchored waiting for daylight. . . . Passing through the minefield was like crossing a chasm by a plank. It was absolutely necessary to get one foot at least upon the hither

² The thirteen merchant ships were: *Derrymore* (4,799 tons); *Redang* (531); *Ipoh* (1,279); *Ampang* (213); *Jalakrishna* (4,991); *Jalavihar* (5,330); *Jalaratna* (3,942); *Oriskany* (1,644); *Ashridge* (2,884); *Hong Kheng* (6,167); *Sin Kheng Seng* (200); *Aquarius* (6,094); *Lee Sang* (1,655). Sinclair recorded that *Kedah* had 345 airmen on board; *Durban* 57 "personnel"; *Jupiter* and *Stronghold* 150 naval men from Singapore; and *Empire Star* some 900 servicemen. *Gorgon* also had a number on board.

³ *ML.310*, motor launch (1941), 73 tons; lost by enemy action 15 Feb 1942, at Tjebia Island.

end of the plank.”⁴ *Kedah*, *Durban*, and their convoy got away at daylight (*Stronghold* and *Jupiter* had been directed to escort any other ships they could), cleared the minefield, and about 7 a.m. on the 12th enemy dive bombing attacks began and continued at intervals throughout the day. *Gorgon* (Sinclair later recalled) escaped scatheless, and *Kedah* received only minor splinter hits; but *Empire Star* was hit twice with many casualties, and *Durban* had six or seven killed and seventeen injured, her forward 6-inch put out of action, and much navigating gear knocked about so that Captain Cazalet asked me to take over navigating duties and to lead the convoy the rest of the way. We entered Banka Strait after dark. Order now was *Kedah*, *Empire Star*, *Gorgon*, *Durban*. When about at the worst part odd little shapes began to loom up ahead. Our speed was thirteen knots to keep the string closed up, which they were well and truly doing, when suddenly we were into the puzzle ahead. I ordered “Switch on navigation lights and keep going”. We had caught up with the last outpouring of all the small craft from the Singapore Inner Roads on the previous day. Small K.P.M.’s, Straits Steamships, Red Funnels, Black Funnels, 75-tonners, small craft towing unfinished motor sweepers. The only thing to do was to go straight on. We did, and missed everything.

Kedah and her company cleared Banka Strait just before daylight on the 13th, a little ahead of the four Australian corvettes and their convoy from Palembang. Both groups of ships hugged the Sumatra coast and thus kept some miles to the westward of the main route. They consequently escaped damage from enemy air attacks that day. Ships which kept to the main route—including the tankers of “MS.3” from Palembang, which were being escorted by *Jupiter* and *Stronghold*—were less fortunate. *Bendigo*, in her account of the day’s proceedings, recorded a fruitless attack by eight enemy aircraft at 11.32 a.m. “The expected return visit from the Nips did not eventuate. They had in fact found a more interesting object for their attentions in the shape of seven large tankers about 40 miles to the eastwards.”⁵ Of the same incident Sinclair later wrote:

Jupiter and *Stronghold* were ahead of and to the eastward of us, with four tankers full of aviation spirit from Bukum,⁶ and the *Derrymore* loaded with ammunition. Cutting the corner off, we passed them and escaped attention on this day, which was Friday, the thirteenth of February. . . . Soon *Jupiter* and *Stronghold*, over the horizon and just forward of our beam, were asking for assistance. They were being heavily attacked by bombers. *Durban* went off on to the eastern horizon, but did not care to lose sight of his own chickens. The ammunition ship⁷ was sunk and all four tankers blazing furiously. . . . We were left unmolested.

Of the tankers with *Jupiter* and *Stronghold*, *Merula* and *Manvantara* received direct hits, and were set on fire and lost. *Toowoomba* was

⁴ Sinclair, commenting that *Empire Star* and *Gorgon* were among the ships anchored there because “there isn’t any bloody buoy”, remarked: “Had there been, these two ships, together with many who never arrived [at Java] but who had left earlier, would have been 12 hours steaming away from risk and disaster and nearer safety. . . . It is only my private guess that during that evening and next morning [13-14 Feb] the stragglers, and particularly those who had been pinned to the northward of the Durian Strait minefield by darkness and the missing light-buoy, fell to the advance scouting aircraft and sea forces preparing and clearing the way for the attack on Palembang.”

⁵ There were apparently six: *Manvantara*, *Merula*, *Erling Brövig*, *Herborg*, *Seirstad* and *Elsa*.

⁶ Sinclair was writing in August 1942 from memory, which was here at fault.

⁷ *Derrymore* was sunk on this day, but at 9 p.m., and by a submarine in the vicinity of the South Watcher, some 50 miles NNW of Batavia.

detached from his force by Farquharson to assist them, and picked up forty-two survivors from *Merula*. *Herborg* took *Merula* in tow, but later her fire got out of control, and she had to be abandoned. The ships of these three groups—the *Durban's* convoy, with the exception of *Gorgon*, which went on direct to Fremantle; Farquharson's convoy; and the surviving tankers, reached Batavia during the 13th and 14th of February. The tankers, *Herborg*, *Erling Brøvig*, *Seirstad* and *Elsa*, with *Jupiter* and *Toowoomba*, arrived there on the 14th, as did *Ballarat*. This ship was bombed in Banka Strait during the morning of the 13th, but escaped damage and casualties. Soon after noon on the 14th, ten miles S.S.W. of the South Watcher light, she came across survivors of the torpedoed *Derrymore*. It was an extraordinary sight. Over a large area the sea was covered with rafts and boats from the lost ship, and with planks and small makeshift rafts each supporting only two or three persons. *Ballarat* sent away her motor-boat and whaler to round up and collect the small parties, while she herself rescued those from the large rafts and boats. The work took nearly five hours, during which 215 survivors were rescued. Of these, 189 were British airmen, and the remaining 26 were of the ship's crew.

After *Hobart* took over from *Cornwall* the escort of convoy "JS.1", *Exeter*, *Java*, *Electra* and *Jumna* also joined the convoy of eight ships, of which five, *Filleigh*, *Yoma*, *Lulworth Hill*, *Hai Lee*, and *Hermion*, arrived at Oosthaven, at the southern tip of Sumatra, on 13th February, while the remaining three reached Batavia on the 14th. To provide anti-submarine protection for the Oosthaven ships, the corvettes *Goulburn* and *Burnie* were sent from Batavia to the Sumatran port, and reached there on the 12th, where they joined *Jumna* in carrying out anti-submarine patrols in the approaches, while the troops disembarked and the equipment was unloaded.

In Java the corvette *Maryborough*, which had been boiler cleaning and docking at Tanjong Priok, took over the anti-submarine duties of *Goulburn* and *Burnie* at that port, with a short break on the 12th when she gave anti-submarine protection to convoy "SJ.1", of eight ships⁸ to a position in Sunda Strait. Convoy "SJ.1" was the first of those organised to relieve the growing congestion at Tanjong Priok, and get ships out of the ABDA Area as quickly as possible. Off Oosthaven it was joined by five Dutch vessels, and the convoy of thirteen merchant ships (two of which were each towing an immobilised naval vessel, H.M. Ships *Isis* and *Rover*⁹) proceeded to Colombo escorted by H.M. Ships *Dorsetshire* and *Express*, and H.M.I.S. *Sutlej*. *Dorsetshire* took over the escort of "SJ.1" after escorting convoy "JS.2"—of one ship, *Orcades*—from Colombo. She handed "JS.2" over to *Dragon* and *Encounter* south of Sunda Strait, and that convoy proceeded to Oosthaven, where it arrived on the 15th.

⁸ *Madura* (9,032 tons); *City of Canterbury* (8,331); *Anglo Indian* (5,609); *Yuen Sang* (3,229); *Clan Alpine* (5,442); *Halizones* (5,298); *Malancha* (8,124); and *City of Pretoria* (8,049).

⁹ HMS *Rover*, submarine (1931), 1,475 tons, one 4-in gun, eight 21-in torp tubes, 17.5 kts.

XV

On 9th February Admiral Hart asked to be relieved of his duties as Abdafloat, and on the 12th the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington directed Wavell "to let Hart maintain the nominal title of Abdafloat but delegate his operational duties to Admiral Helfrich". Helfrich was instructed to relieve Hart on the 14th.¹

Meanwhile, as stated above, the Japanese concentration at the Anambas Islands had been sighted, and ineffectually attacked by Allied aircraft on the nights of the 8th-9th and the 11th-12th February; and on the 12th General Wavell ordered a naval striking force to assemble at the western end of Java to attack the convoy as soon as it moved southwards. Rear-Admiral Doorman, with the remnants of his Macassar Strait force, was then south of Sumbawa Island where Hart had sent him to await further orders. He was now ordered some 800 miles west to a rendezvous north of Tanjong Priok, where other ships to constitute the force were instructed to meet him. It was a time-consuming journey.

Hobart was escorting the Oosthaven portion of convoy "JS.1" when, on the 13th, Howden received a signal from Collins telling him to join the striking force at Oosthaven at 10 a.m. on the 14th. When *Hobart* anchored there at 9 a.m. she found *De Ruyter*, *Java*, *Tromp*, and the Dutch destroyers *Van Ghent*, *Banckert*, *Piet Hein* and *Kortenaer*² had already arrived. *Exeter*, which had escorted the Batavia section of "JS.1" to that port, turned up at 9.15; and the six U.S. destroyers, *Bulmer*, *Barker*, *Stewart*, *Parrott*, *Edwards*, and *Pillsbury*, arrived during the day. Helfrich had by now assumed the Abdafloat appointment vice Hart, and Doorman flew across from Oosthaven to Batavia to discuss with him the impending operation, the responsibility for which Hart, the previous day, had asked Helfrich to take over. Speed was a necessity, and Banka Strait was the quickest route by which to get at the enemy. But by this time Japanese ships had been sighted at the north entrance of the strait, and the possibility of enemy minelaying in the strait had to be considered. It was decided that Doorman should take the longer, difficult route north through the unlighted Gaspar Strait; if possible should take the enemy in the rear from the north of Banka Island; and subsequently, if practicable, should return through Banka Strait.

But once again the time factor decreed that the issue should be decided before Doorman could get to grips. On the morning of the 14th, before Doorman's force had assembled at Oosthaven, a strong Japanese air formation of bombers, fighters, and transport aircraft carrying 360 parachute troops, took off from airfields in southern Malaya for the mouth of the Musi River. Smoke from Singapore had drifted as far south as Palembang, and the enemy air formation reached the river mouth without being

¹ The reference to the Chiefs of Staff directive to Wavell, is from Morison's *History of US Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. III, p. 312; and to Helfrich's instructions to relieve Hart, from Helfrich's unpublished notes.

² *Kortenaer*, Dutch destroyer (1928), 1,310 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; torpedoed in Battle of Java Sea 27 Feb 1942.

sighted, and flew up the river to Palembang. The defending air striking force of Hurricane fighters had earlier taken off to attack the Japanese surface forces in Banka Strait, and there was therefore no air opposition to the airborne enemy. Palembang I airfield was heavily bombed, and 260 parachute troops dropped in the surrounding bush; and 100 near the oil refineries a few miles away at Pladju and Sungei Gerong. Fierce fighting swayed backwards and forwards during the day. By the evening the enemy parachute troops had suffered heavy casualties, and though the defenders had destroyed unserviceable aircraft and equipment at Palembang I airfield, and withdrawn the ground force to Palembang II, the Dutch commander was confident that Palembang I could be recaptured next day.

Japanese reinforcements were, however, at hand. On the 14th the advance convoy entered Banka Strait, and though some punishment was inflicted on it by Allied air attack, it entered Muntok Harbour, on Banka Island, that evening. A landing was made on the island, which was quickly occupied against only token resistance. The Japanese army amphibious force trans-shipped to landing craft in Muntok Harbour during the night, and at dawn on the 15th crossed the strait and entered the Musi River delta, and proceeded upstream. That morning, also, another 100 parachute troops were dropped on Palembang I airfield. All day long the amphibious invading forces were hammered by Allied air striking forces from Palembang II airfield, but though they were delayed, they were not stopped, and during the night of the 15th-16th the leading troops reached the outskirts of Palembang and joined up with the parachute troops. By the evening of the 15th the Dutch and British forces had left Palembang by road and rail for Oosthaven. And, also on that evening, the British in Singapore, 270 miles to the northward, surrendered to the victorious Japanese. Wavell ordered all British units in Sumatra to withdraw to Java.

CHAPTER 16

DEFEAT IN ABDA

WHILE the Japanese surface forces stealing up the Musi River were being continuously attacked by Allied air forces on the 15th February, Doorman's striking force was the target for repeated fierce attacks by Japanese aircraft to the east of Banka Island. The force weighed and left Oosthaven at 4 p.m. on the 14th, and formed in two columns. The Dutch cruisers, led by *De Ruyter*, were to starboard; and the British, led by *Hobart* as Senior Officer, to port. The six U.S. destroyers screened ahead; and three Dutch astern. One of the four Dutch ships had been sent on ahead to mark Two Brothers Island off the south-east coast of Sumatra, and join later. Air reconnaissance on the 13th had indicated four groups of enemy vessels: two cruisers, two destroyers, and two transports about sixty miles south of the Anambas Islands, steering south-west at 10 a.m.; one cruiser, three destroyers and eight transports some twenty miles to the eastward of the first group, and steering south at 10.30 a.m.; three cruisers, five destroyers and one transport, about sixty miles north of Banka Island and steering west at 3.30 p.m.; and two destroyers with fourteen transports about 100 miles north of Billiton island, and steering S.S.W., at 4.30 p.m.

Doorman led his force northwards in accordance with the decisions reached by him and Helfrich—to go northwards through Gaspar Strait, round Banka, and back through Banka Strait, “destroying any enemy forces seen”. Visibility was poor during the night (14th-15th February) passage, and at 5.20 a.m. on the 15th the Dutch destroyer *Van Ghent* ran ashore on a reef in Stolze Strait. *Banckert* was sent to stand by and take off her crew. At 6 a.m. *De Ruyter* flew off her aircraft which, at 8.37 a.m., reported seven cruisers and three destroyers ten miles N.E. of Pulau Laut (some forty-five miles north of Banka Island) steering N.W. at high speed. Interception of this force was not possible if it continued its northerly course and speed. Doorman continued as planned, cleared Gaspar Strait, and steered in a north-westerly curve some sixty miles east of Banka, to round the north of the island. Japanese shadowing aircraft were sighted at 9.23 a.m. on the 15th, and from then on the force was continuously shadowed while north of Gaspar Strait. The first bombing attack was delivered by two Japanese formations at 11.50 a.m.

By 12.30 p.m., when it was obvious that the position, course and composition of the force had been reported, and as conditions were favourable for air attack, Doorman decided, in view of the total absence of Allied air support, to return to Batavia—and through Gaspar Strait. Course was accordingly reversed at 12.42 p.m., when the force was about forty miles east of the north-east point of Banka Island. Until dusk the ships were the target for successive heavy air attacks—at 11.50 a.m., and, during the afternoon, at 12.17; 12.29; 2 p.m.; 2.20; 2.41; 2.50; 2.54; 2.59; 3.3

p.m.; 3.17; 5.13; and 5.28. Ships were near-missed and often completely hidden in the lofty columns of water raised by the exploding bombs; but they were skilfully handled and escaped other than superficial damage, though *Barker* and *Bulmer* were badly shaken. *Hobart* estimated that a total of 109 enemy aircraft took part in the attacks, the heaviest of which was when three formations, of nine, eight, and seven aircraft respectively, carried out a simultaneous attack on the Australian cruiser. The average size of the enemy bomb was 500 lb, though some heavier were dropped. It was of this day's attacks that Captain Howden later wrote: "the bombs fell close enough for me to see the ugly red flash of their burst and to feel the heat of their explosions across my face—but the ship steamed clear." Commenting that with a less alert engine-room team the results might have been different, he remarked that "There have been occasions when I have had to call for the most violent manoeuvring of the main engines, and the instant answer has resulted in swinging the ship in a manner I hardly thought possible. On one occasion I found it necessary to go from 24 knots ahead to 24 knots astern on one engine, while going full ahead on the other."

The shadowing aircraft sighted by Doorman's force at 9.23 a.m. on the 15th was a reconnaissance machine flown off by *Chokai*, Ozawa's flagship. The Japanese admiral received its report about 10 a.m., "Three enemy cruisers and five destroyers sailing northwards through Gaspar Strait 0938". The main Japanese convoy from Camranh Bay was then east of the Lingga Archipelago, steering south. Ozawa ordered it to withdraw to the north; and aircraft from *Ryujo*, and land attack aircraft of the *Genzan Air Unit*, to deliver the attacks which they made on the Allied force during the day. Not until it was clear that Doorman had withdrawn, did Ozawa order the main convoy to resume to the southward, and it was the evening of the 16th before it reached the mouth of the Musi River, and the afternoon of the 17th before it reached Palembang, by which time the advance force had occupied the town.

Because of the congestion at Tanjong Priok (where on 16th February every berth was crowded and at least thirty ships were anchored in the roads) the striking force was split up between Java and Sumatra on its return. "*Hobart*, *Exeter*, *Tromp*, *Barker* and *Bulmer* followed *De Ruyter* in to Tanjong Priok and anchored at 9.52 a.m. on the 16th," recorded *Hobart*. That morning too, the rest of the American destroyers arrived at Ratai Bay to fuel. It was noted, as the force returned south through Gaspar Strait, that *Van Ghent* which had been bombed was now a fiercely burning wreck. Howden observed of the operation that it again directed attention to the necessity of providing adequate air protection for ships operating within range of enemy aircraft. It illustrated, also, the disability imposed upon Doorman by distance. With the Japanese thrusting spearheads a thousand miles apart, invaluable time was lost by the Allies in endeavouring, with the small naval forces at their disposal, to meet and counter each alternate thrust as it was made. Inevitably it meant that they were too late. Doorman's northward sweep delayed the arrival of the main

Japanese convoy at Palembang by twenty-four hours. Had Doorman been twenty-four hours earlier, he could have gone north through Banka Strait, and his attack on the leading Japanese convoy and covering forces could have coincided with Allied air attacks thereon, with possibly far reaching effects on the fate of southern Sumatra. As it was, the advance convoy was beyond his reach on the 15th, and distance alone would have prevented his reaching the main convoy, even without the enemy air attack which, had he persisted in attempting to go north or enter Banka Strait, would most probably have involved him in heavy and fruitless losses. In the circumstances, to withdraw as he did was the only wise course.

II

On the 16th February, the day some of the American destroyers of the striking force reached Ratai Bay, near Oosthaven, preparations were well under way for the final withdrawal of Allied forces and refugees from Sumatra through that port. The ships of convoys "JS.1" and "JS.2" were still there. Troops had disembarked from "JS.1", and equipment had been off-loaded; but the re-embarkation of the troops and the destruction of the equipment on shore had been ordered; and the troops in "JS.2" (*Orcades*) were ordered not to disembark. In addition to the ships of the two convoys, naval vessels at Oosthaven included the Australian ships *Yarra* (now under the command of Lieut-Commander Rankin¹); *Goulburn*; and *Burnie*; the Dutch gunboat *Soemba*;² and the British *Tenedos* and *Encounter*. On the 16th the ships of convoys "JS.1" and "JS.2" sailed for Java. *Yarra* escorted *Filleigh*, *Lulworth Hill* and *Hai Lee* to Batavia; and *Tenedos* and *Encounter* escorted *Orcades* and *Yoma* to that port. Meanwhile attempts to clear the congestion at Tanjong Priok continued, and on the 16th convoy "SJ.2", *Plancius* and *Empire Star*, carrying between them some 3,000 refugees, sailed thence, *Plancius* for Colombo, escorted by *Durban*; and *Empire Star* for Fremantle, proceeding independently after clearing Sunda Strait. Admiral Hart was a passenger in *Durban*.

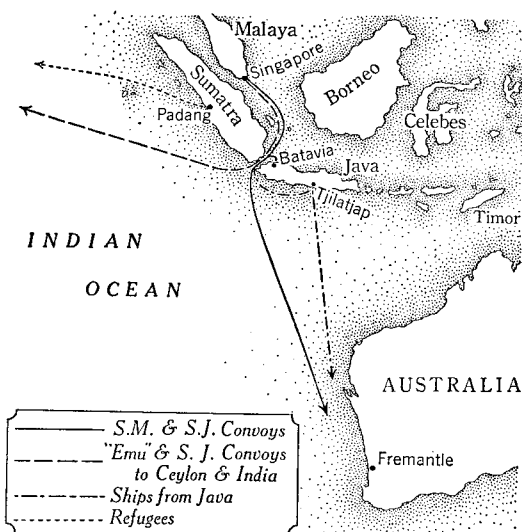
From the 13th to the 16th February *Goulburn* and *Burnie* provided anti-submarine protection of the approaches to Oosthaven; and on the 17th they entered the port to see if they could there help the demolition parties in their work. *Goulburn*, however, was diverted from this to escort four Dutch ships—*Both* (2,601 tons); *Marilyse Moller* (786 tons); *Stagen* (2,539 tons); and *Balikipapen* (1,279 tons)—clear of the Malay Barrier into the Indian Ocean. During the 18th the Dutch *Van Outhoorn* (2,069 tons) joined the convoy which that evening, in the vicinity of Christmas Island, was dispersed for its ships to make independently for their various destinations. *Goulburn* proceeded to Tjilatjap, where she arrived in the afternoon of the 19th.

¹ Lt-Cdr R. W. Rankin, RAN. HMS *Resource* 1939-41; comd HMAS *Yarra* 1942. Of Merrylands, NSW; b. Cobar, NSW, 3 Jun 1907. Lost in sinking of *Yarra* 4 Mar 1942. Rankin assumed command of *Yarra*, vice Harrington, in Batavia on 11 Feb. Harrington returned to Australia.

² *Soemba*, Dutch gunboat (1926), 1,457 tons, three 5.9-in guns, 15 kts.

Back in Oosthaven, *Burnie* had a busy two days helping in the final withdrawal and demolition, work that her commanding officer, Lieutenant Christy,³ carried out in close cooperation with the captain of *Soemba*. At 6 p.m. on the 17th, Christy anchored one cable off shore in a position where *Burnie's* gun commanded a bridge giving access to the wharf. A demolition party was landed, and in cooperation with Major Law⁴ of the Gordon Highlanders and Lieut-Commander Brister,⁵ R.N., worked through the night. They destroyed ammunition dumps and rolling stock; landed four depth charges, three of which were placed under the K.P.M. wharf and one in the cargo sheds; and poured sulphuric acid into the working parts, and hammered over the propeller blades, of four trucks of torpedoes. At 3 p.m. on the 18th the rearguard (N.E.I. troops under the command of General de Vries) embarked in the last remaining merchant ship, which then sailed. At 3.20 p.m. the depth charges were exploded and the K.P.M. wharf blown up, and all rubber stocks were set on fire. *Burnie* weighed at 4.20 p.m., and in a short bombardment set the oil tanks on fire; blew up ammunition dumps; and destroyed the bridge of the approach road from Tanjong Kereng. At 5.30 p.m. on the 18th *Burnie* departed for Tanjong Priok, where she arrived next morning.

This period saw a further clearance of ships from Tanjong Priok with the sailing of convoys "SJ.3", "SJ.4" and "SM.2". "SJ.3", which sailed on the 17th February was of six ships, three for Colombo⁶ and three⁷ (one of which towed the immobilised *Vendetta*) for Fremantle. *Yarra* escorted the Fremantle portion to a position some 200 miles south of Christmas Island where, on the 22nd February, *Adelaide* was met and took over onward escort. *Yarra* returned to Tanjong Priok, where she arrived on the 24th. The other two convoys, "SJ.4"



Exodus from ABDA

³ Lt-Cdr T. Christy, RANR(S). HMAS *Warrego* 1940-41; assumed command of *Burnie* vice Lt G. E. Gough on 16 Jan 1942. Harbour-master and ship surveyor; of Port Kembla, NSW; b. Southport, Eng, 31 Jan 1900.

⁴ Col A. T. Law, DSO, TD. Gordon Highlanders. Shipping official; of London; b. London 2 Jun 1909.

⁵ Lt-Cdr H. P. Brister, RN. HMS's *Durban* 1941-42, *Ramillies* 1942-43, *Calliope* 1945. B. 21 Nov 1902. Died 18 Oct 1948.

⁶ *Krian* (857 tons); *Oriskany*; *Resang* (252 tons).

⁷ *Giang Ann* (1,063 tons); *Darvel*; *Ping Wo* (3,105). *Ping Wo* towed *Vendetta* to Fremantle.

of seven ships⁸ for Colombo and "SM.2" of two ships⁹ for Fremantle, sailed from Tanjong Priok on the 19th February.¹ As it turned out, the Allied departure from both Palembang and Oosthaven was premature. The defenders left Palembang by the evening of the 15th February, nearly forty-eight hours before the main Japanese invasion force reached there; and it was more than forty-eight hours after the Dutch rearguard left on the 18th February before the first Japanese arrived at Oosthaven. This lapse of time enabled the salvaging of important air force equipment from the port, in response to a request from General Wavell.

It will be recalled that Christy, in *Burnie*, secured alongside at Tanjong Priok at 9.35 a.m. on the 19th. An hour later he reported to Commodore Collins at Navy Office. Fresh from Oosthaven, with his knowledge of conditions there, he was instructed to take over temporary command of *Ballarat* from Lieut-Commander Barling, to sail that ship to the Sumatran port with three officers and fifty R.A.F. other ranks led by Group Captain Nicholetts² and salvage as much of the air force gear as possible. *Ballarat* arrived off Oosthaven at 4 a.m. on the 20th. At daylight, Christy went off in the whaler and surveyed the harbour entrance (where some barges had been sunk by *Burnie*), while *Ballarat's* company stood to at action stations with guns covering the shore. Christy was back at the ship at 8 a.m.; the whaler was hoisted inboard; and after a bombardment of the area around the wharf with her 4-inch gun, *Ballarat* went alongside and secured. A party of thirty airmen armed with tommy guns covered the northern approaches to the wharf, and twenty of the ship's company with rifles, under the command of *Ballarat's* First Lieutenant, covered the southern approach. The rest of the R.A.F. units and ship's company loaded the equipment on board. The task was completed at 3 p.m.; the covering parties were recalled; and at 3.15 p.m. *Ballarat* sailed, and

⁸ Erling Brövig; *Modasa*; *Stanmore* (4,970 tons); *Lee Sang*; *Generaal Michiels* (1,282); *Generaal van Geen* (1,290); and *Generaal van Swieten* (1,300).

⁹ *Whang Pu* (3,204 tons); *Cable Enterprise* (943).

¹ *Vendetta* eventually reached Melbourne and berthed in the Victoria Dock at 1.30 p.m. on 4th April after an eventful voyage of approximately 5,000 miles in tow from Singapore, a voyage that took seventy-two days. In dockyard hands in Keppel Harbour, Singapore, when Japan attacked, she was under the command of Lieutenant W. G. Whitting; with two officers, Mr J. C. Lace and Mr N. J. E. Lark, and eighteen ratings as complement. In one of the worst air raids on Singapore, when the port was attacked by a total of 125 bombers on the 21st January, *Vendetta's* 12-pounder gun went into action "and to our great delight our 12-pdr H.E. shell hit one of the bombers in the bomb rack, and she instantly blew up, damaging the planes (two in number) on either side with the flying debris". When in tow of the tug *St Just* and H.M.S. *Stronghold* on the 3rd February while on passage from Singapore to Palembang, the three ships were targets for heavy bombing in which it was estimated "between 100 and 120 bombs" fell around them. The tow from Batavia to Fremantle took 15 days. That from Fremantle to Melbourne—via Adelaide—was a nightmare voyage. *Ping Wo* towed as far as Albany, and from there *Islander* (1,598 tons) took over the tow. Between Albany and Melbourne the tow parted four times, resulting in *Vendetta*, in heavy weather, being "at the entire mercy of wind and sea, pounding and rolling very badly". Quite early in the run across the Bight, *Ping Wo*, for a while in company, disappeared. *Islander* and *Vendetta* were hove to in a heavy gale, "the ship washing down everywhere. . . . *Ping Wo* has completely disappeared. We last saw her running before the gale like a surf board." The destroyer's small company had to handle their end of the tow with a hand capstan—one of the bars of which fractured. Chief Petty Officer A. J. Thorne's leg on the forecandle one wild day. Whitting recorded, in his narrative of the voyage: "Living conditions in the ship throughout were not the best. There was no power in the ship, no sanitary arrangements, and only tinned food was available owing to the absence of any refrigerator or ice box." However, the voyage was successfully concluded.

² AVM G. E. Nicholetts, CB, AFC; RAF. Comd 228 Sqn 1939-41. Of Bath, Eng; b. Bampton, Devon, Eng, 9 Nov 1902.

reached Tanjong Priok without enemy interference at 1.30 a.m. on the 21st.

By this time the Japanese spearhead in the east had struck again, and it was obvious that the main enemy attack on Java was near. General Wavell had forecast to the British Chiefs of Staff that the invasion of Java would begin before the end of February, and on the 21st he cabled to Churchill:

I am afraid that the defence of ABDA Area has broken down and the defence of Java cannot now last long. It always hinged on the air battle. . . . Anything put into Java now can do little to prolong struggle. . . . I see little further usefulness for this H.Q.

The next day, in response to instructions from Churchill to proceed to India to resume as Commander-in-Chief there, he told the British Prime Minister that he planned to leave Java on the 25th February. On the 17th February Collins instituted the Sunda Strait Auxiliary Patrol of five British and six Dutch ships.³ The British auxiliaries, coal burners which it was difficult to supply with bunkers, were on the 22nd February replaced by *Maryborough*, *Bendigo*, *Ballarat* and *Burnie*. The task of the ships of the Sunda Strait Patrol was to prevent Japanese landings on Java from native craft. It was night work, and the ships, with hands closed up at action stations, patrolled the strait during the dark hours, and intercepted (often with machine-gun fire) and examined all vessels encountered. By day they anchored at Merak on the north-west point of Java; or at Labuhan, some thirty miles to the south on Java's west coast. Every day while they were at anchor, flights of enemy aircraft passed overhead; but they were pre-occupied with bombing missions on Java, and no attack was made on the ships until the 27th, when the four Australian ships, and the Dutch *Soemba*, *Sirius*, and *Fazandt*, were anchored in company at Merak.

That morning a prau flying the White Ensign was sighted, and proved to contain a British naval officer (Lieutenant Bull⁴), two soldiers, and three natives. They had sailed from the Tujeh, or Seven, Islands, twenty miles north of Banka; and reported that Rear-Admiral Spooner and Air Vice-Marshal Pulford were with a party on one of the islands. They were among some hundreds of men, women and children in similar straits.

For many of the ships which left Singapore after the 12th February it was their last voyage. Most of those which survived the heavy bombing ran into the surface vessels of Ozawa's squadron, the guns and aircraft of which struck mercilessly at the crowded ships. Around the 14th to the 16th February some forty ships, large and small, were sunk by bombs or gun fire with heavy loss of life; and many others were wrecked or driven ashore. They included *ML.310*, the 73-ton naval launch in which Rear-Admiral Spooner's party left Singapore on the night of the 13th-14th; and about seventeen others of the small craft which left that night.

³ British ships: HMS's *Wo Kwang*; *Rahman*; *Gemas*; *Jeram*; *Sin Aik Lee*.
Dutch ships: *Soemba*; *Sirius*; *Bellatrix*; *Rigel*; *Fazandt*; *Merel*.

⁴ Lt-Cdr H. J. Bull, DSC; RNVR and RNZNVR. HMS *Scorpion* 1941; HMS's *Grasshopper* and *MLJ062* 1941-42. Of Auckland, NZ; b. Auckland, 17 Aug 1913.

Nearly a thousand British survivors, men, women and children, were collected from the islands of the Rhio Archipelago and transported to safety via Sumatra through the energy and self-sacrifice of the native ruler of the Archipelago (the Malay chieftain, Amir Silalahi) and his people. They were ferried over to the mouth of the Inderagiri River, fifty or sixty miles away in Sumatra, most of them in native craft, but some in small ships of the Royal Navy, such as H.M.S. *Hung Jau*. From the Inderagiri River they crossed Sumatra to Padang, where most of them were evacuated by the Royal Navy.⁵

ML.310, with Rear-Admiral Spooner's party, was one of the ships which survived the bombing on the 14th February but fell victim to Ozawa's squadron on the 15th, when it was chased and sunk off Tjebia Island by a Japanese destroyer. When Lieutenant Bull told his story to Commander Cant in *Maryborough* at Merak on the 27th February, Cant arranged for him to go to Headquarters at Batavia, to report direct there. But by this time Japanese control of the sea and air prevented any attempts at rescue being organised. It was learned later that it was over two months before the survivors were able to cross from the island to Sumatra, where they surrendered to the Japanese. By then eighteen of the original party had died, including the Admiral and Air Marshal.⁶

In the afternoon of the 27th February *Goulburn* (which had returned to Tanjong Priok from Tjilatjap on the 24th) and *Toowoomba* (which had been on escort work and anti-submarine patrol off Tanjong Priok) joined the Sunda Strait patrol ships at Merak, where they arrived simultaneously with formations of Japanese bombers which attacked in waves of three. Anti-aircraft fire from ships broke up the attacks and no material damage was done, but *Soemba* suffered some casualties.

The day previously, the last commercial convoy to leave Tanjong Priok before the invasion of Java, sailed from that port. It was the British *Ashridge* which was escorted through Sunda Strait by H.M.S. *Stronghold*. After the sailings of convoys "SJ.4" and "SM.2" on the 19th February, nine more convoys, totalling thirty-two ships, left Tanjong Priok,⁷ bringing the sailings in organised convoys from the departure of "SJ.1" on the 12th February, to 57 ships in 14 convoys.

In the meantime another Australian ship, the cruiser *Perth*, joined the Allied forces in the ABDA Area. During January the Chiefs of Staff in

⁵ And some by the Royal Australian Navy. *Hobart* embarked 512 refugees at Padang on the 1st March, and later on passage to Colombo took on board another 136 from *Dragon*. *Nizam* left Colombo on the 20th February to embark members of the RAF on the west coast of Sumatra; but on the 22nd her mission was cancelled and she returned to Trincomalee.

⁶ Commenting on this in his Unpublished Notes, Admiral Helfrich says: "We, at the time [presumably some ten days or so earlier, when the party first got ashore] didn't know anything about this story. If I had known, it had been easy to save them by sending a submarine. K14 was near the place."

⁷ Feb 19: *Jalaratna*; Feb 20: "SM.3"—*Marella*; *Phrontes*; *Adrastus*, for Fremantle; *City of Manchester*; *Prominent*, for Tjilatjap. "SJ.5": *Yoma*; *Filleigh*; *Lulworth Hill*; *Hai Lee*; *Jalakrishna*; *Angby* (786 tons); *Silverlarch* (5,064), for Colombo. Feb 21: "SJ.6"—*Mangola*; *Thepsatrin Nawa* (3,260); *Klang* (1,451), for Fremantle; *Jalavihar*; *Elsa*; *Straat Soenda* (6,439); *Generaal van der Heyden* (1,213), for Colombo. Feb 22: "SJ.7"—*Orcades*, for Colombo. Feb 22: "SJ.8"—*Edendale* (1,659), for Fremantle; *Fu-Kwang* (1,559); *Tinombo* (872); *Rooseboom* (1,035), for Colombo. Feb 23: "SM.4"—*Springdale* (1,579), for Fremantle; *Seirstad*; *Perak* (1,188), for Colombo. Feb 24: *Indragiri* (592); *Nam Yong* (1,345); *Boero* (7,135), for Colombo. Feb 26: *Ashridge*.

Washington asked that *Perth* should be sent to Wavell's command immediately, and suggested that any delay in meeting Australian naval commitments there endangered the security of Western Australia. The Naval Board had intended to retain *Perth* in the Anzac Area to enable *Canberra* to carry out an overdue refit. Admiral Royle, however, now recommended that *Perth* should go to the ABDA Area as soon as possible, and on her way there should escort convoy "MS.4", of four tankers and two cargo ships. The War Cabinet approved this on the 29th January, and on the 31st *Perth* left Sydney, and reached Fremantle, via Melbourne, on the 10th February. *Adelaide* escorted "MS.4" from Melbourne to Western Australia, and on the 15th February *Perth* took over from her as ocean escort. On that day Singapore surrendered, and Palembang's hour was striking. It was useless sending any more tankers up there, and *Perth's* convoy, with the exception of one ship, the Dutch *'Jacob* (2,839 tons), was ordered in to Fremantle. *Perth* continued northwards with her one charge, and was later joined by two more Dutch ships, *Swarthenhondt* (5,084 tons) and *Karsik* (3,057 tons). In the evening of the 21st, when about 600 miles south of Sunda Strait, the convoy was ordered back to Fremantle. *Perth* escorted it to within about 700 miles of that port, and then left it to make Fremantle independently, and herself turned northwards again. On the 24th February, the day *Goulburn* returned there from Tjilatjap and *Yarra* arrived there from escort duties, *Perth* entered Tanjong Priok while a Japanese air raid on the port was in progress. The next day she sailed, with *Exeter*, *Jupiter*, *Electra* and *Encounter*, to join Rear-Admiral Doorman in Surabaya.

III

Doorman had gone to the east a week earlier, immediately after his return to Batavia from the abortive sweep against the Japanese Palembang convoy. For some days there had been increasing indications that the next Japanese thrust would be against Bali and Timor. On the 26th January Koepang was attacked by enemy fighter aircraft, and from then on Timor was subjected to increasingly intensive daily reconnaissance, with intermittent air raids by both heavy bombers and fighters on Timor itself and the adjacent islands of Alor and Roti, and on ships in the vicinity. The presence of fighter aircraft suggested that an enemy aircraft carrier was somewhere in the area.⁸

The importance of Timor as a staging point for short-range aircraft reinforcement of the ABDA Area from Australia, caused General Wavell to seek reinforcement of the island's garrison when the Japanese threat became apparent. In this he departed from his principle that outlying garrisons should not be reinforced. United States troops of the 147th and

⁸ Two Australian naval officers were concerned in one of these air raids on Koepang on the 30th January. They were Lieutenants D. W. McCulloch and B. L. Westbrook, who were passengers in a civil flying-boat, on passage from Darwin to Batavia to take up appointments at Collins' headquarters. The aircraft was coming in to land at Koepang as the raid developed, and was attacked at 400 feet by seven enemy fighters, and shot down three miles from shore near the mouth of the Mina River. Fifteen of the passengers and crew, including McCulloch, were killed. The remaining five, of which Westbrook was one, managed to swim ashore.

148th Field Artillery were at Darwin, where they had arrived on the 5th January in the transport *Holbrook*, one of the original *Pensacola* convoy. The Americans agreed that their troops could be sent from Darwin to Timor, and on the 27th January Wavell asked the Australian authorities to send the 2/4th Pioneer Battalion (also at Darwin) with them. This request was at first refused, and the retention of the American troops at Darwin was urged by Lieut-General Sturdee,⁹ the Chief of the Australian General Staff, on the grounds of (a) the weakness of the Darwin garrison and (b) the fact that the arrival of these reinforcements on Timor would have little effect in preventing the loss of the island.¹ General Wavell reiterated his request, however, and supported it by saying that he was himself sending to Timor some light anti-aircraft guns from Java.² Eventually, on the 7th February, the Australian Government gave way, and on the 10th February U.S.S. *Houston* left Tjilatjap (where she had arrived on the 5th after the unsuccessful attempt against the Japanese Macassar assault convoy) for Darwin, to form part of the escort of the convoy carrying the reinforcements. Of four ships—the American transports *Meigs* (12,568 tons); *Mauna Loa* (5,436 tons); and *Portmar* (5,551 tons); and the British *Tulagi* (2,281 tons)—the convoy left Darwin for Koepang on the 15th February escorted by *Houston*, the U.S. destroyer *Peary*, and the Australian sloops *Warrego* and *Swan*.

The day after the Koepang reinforcement convoy left Darwin, Admiral Doorman reached Tanjong Priok from the Gaspar Strait operation. On 14th February Dutch air reconnaissance reported a Japanese convoy of seven transports, with seven destroyers and three cruisers, off Kendari; and on the 17th another Dutch sighting of two cruisers, two destroyers and three transports was reported fifty miles south-west of Ambon; and Allied intelligence reported that an invasion force was on the point of leaving Macassar for Bali. That day Admiral Helfrich and Rear-Admiral Doorman talked together at Helfrich's headquarters. It was decided to concentrate in the east at once to contest the assault on Bali. *De Ruyter*, *Java*, *Piet Hein*, *Kortenaer*, and the American destroyers *Ford* and *Pope*, would go via the Indian Ocean and Tjilatjap; and *Tromp*, with the four American destroyers from Ratai Bay—*Stewart*, *Parrott*, *Edwards* and *Pillsbury*—via the Java Sea and Surabaya. Helfrich, knowing that time was the vital factor and that the hours consumed in taking the Striking Force from western to eastern Java would possibly make its arrival at the scene of action again too late, told Doorman not to wait until he had concentrated completely, but to make a series of raids in successive "waves"

⁹ Lt-Gen Sir Vernon Sturdee, KBE, CB, DSO, NX35000. (1st AIF: CRE 5 Aust Div 1917-18.) CGS, AMF, 1940-42, 1946-50; GOC First Army, 1944-45. Regular soldier; of Melbourne; b. Frankston, Vic, 16 Apr 1890.

¹ General Sturdee was undoubtedly correct in this, as he was earlier in deciding not to reinforce Rabaul. Admiral Helfrich later wrote: "I agreed with General Sturdee, although my opinion was not asked. I told my liaison officer at Headquarters (Captain van der Kun, RNN). In my opinion an island has to be defended first of all by navy and air force. A small garrison can never hold an island, and sending troops to outlying garrisons means dispersal."

² These guns and their crews left Batavia on the 9 Feb 1942, in S.S. *Ban Hong Liong* (1,671 tons) escorted to Tjilatjap by the Dutch auxiliary *Valk*. Escort from Tjilatjap onwards to Koepang was by the US destroyers *Alden* and *Edsall*. The convoy finally reached Koepang on 16 Feb.

(if that were necessary) through Lombok Strait. In addition, a suggestion by the Dutch naval commander at Surabaya was accepted, that motor torpedo boats from that port should follow up the attacks by the main force, and exploit the enemy confusion.

At 9.10 a.m. on the 18th, a Japanese force of four cruisers³ and two unspecified vessels was reported about 140 miles south-west of Macassar, roughly midway to Bali; and at 3 p.m. it was again (and finally) reported about sixty miles north-east of Bali and proceeding towards the island at 15 knots. It was the advance invasion force from Macassar in the transports *Sagami Maru* (7,189 tons) and *Sasago Maru* (8,260 tons) escorted by *Oshio*, *Asashio*, *Michishio* and *Arashio*⁴ of the 8th Destroyer Division. Rear-Admiral Kubo in *Nagara* with the destroyers *Wakaba*, *Hatsushimo*, and *Nenohi*,⁵ of the 21st Division, was in distant support. The invasion force reached its destination at Bali, off Sanur on the south-east coast, looking across the ten-mile wide Badung Strait to Penida Island, at about 10 p.m. on the 18th. It was at that hour that Doorman's Tjilatjap force sailed, starting its 400-mile run along Java's south coast to Bali. It was one destroyer short of its original complement. Leaving Tjilatjap harbour, *Kortenaer* ran aground, and had to be left behind.

The Japanese invaders met no resistance on shore at Bali, but with daylight on the 19th Allied aircraft began a series of attacks on the convoy and escorts. The attacking airmen estimated the invading force at "two cruisers, four or five destroyers and four transports"; and claimed three direct hits with heavy bombs on one or more cruisers; two direct hits on a transport; and eight near-misses on destroyers; and that one cruiser and one transport were hit with lighter bombs. Apparently some damage was inflicted on the two transports by the bombing, and also by the U.S. submarine *Seawolf*,⁶ which attacked with torpedoes during the afternoon of the 19th. One Japanese report told that a transport was hit by a bomb "and her broadside became useless".⁷ The Japanese, however, successfully executed their mission of landing the advance assault force. By the night of 19th February, when Doorman's force steamed into Badung Strait close under Bali from the Indian Ocean, the landings were completed; *Sagami Maru*, escorted by *Arashio* and *Michishio*, was away to the north and heading back to Celebes; and *Sasago Maru* was just getting under way from the anchorage, with *Arashio* and *Oshio* in attendance.

Doorman arrived off Sanur in line ahead with *De Ruyter*, her main armament trained to starboard, in the lead, followed by *Java*, whose guns were trained to port. *Piet Hein* led the destroyer column some three

³ These ships were in fact destroyers. The Japanese convoy consisted of two transports and four destroyers.

⁴ Japanese destroyers (1937), 1,500 tons, six 5-in guns, eight 24-in torp tubes, 34 kts; *Oshio* sunk on 20 Feb 1943, *Asashio* and *Arashio* on 3 Mar 1943, and *Michishio* on 25 Oct 1944.

⁵ Japanese destroyers (1933-34), 1,368 tons, five 5-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts; *Nenohi* sunk on 4 Jul 1942, *Wakaba* on 24 Oct 1944, and *Hatsushimo* on 30 Jul 1945.

⁶ *Seawolf*, US submarine (1936), 670 tons, one 3-in gun, six 21-in torp tubes, 13.75 kts; lost Oct 1944, off Morotai Island.

⁷ According to Dutch sources, later Japanese reports said that *Sagami Maru* received both bomb and torpedo damage; and *Sasago Maru* bomb damage, and gun fire damage in the later surface action.

miles astern. *Java* was the first to sight enemy ships to port, and opened fire at 10.25 p.m. The Japanese destroyers at once illuminated with searchlight and star shell and returned the fire. There followed a mêlée of some three-quarters of an hour's duration in which *Sasago Maru* was hit by *Java's* gun fire and possibly by a torpedo from *Ford*; and the Dutch destroyer *Piet Hein* was sunk, either by Japanese gun fire or torpedoes. Soon after 11 p.m. this first action was over. The Dutch cruisers headed north-east through Lombok Strait to round Bali north about to Surabaya; the American destroyers headed south to return westwards to Tjilatjap.

About two-and-a-half hours later the second Allied wave entered the combat area. The Surabaya force, which rounded the eastern tip of Java through Bali Strait and then followed in the wake of Doorman's force, arrived off Sanur soon after 1.30 a.m. on 20th February. With the American destroyers, led by *Stewart*, in the van; and with *Tromp* astern to follow up a torpedo attack with her 5.9-inch gun fire; the column sped in to Badung Strait at 25 knots. Again the action was a mêlée in which the initial Japanese opponents were *Oshio* and *Asashio*. They were unharmed by the twenty or so torpedoes fired by the destroyers, and had the best of a gun fire exchange in which they scored hits on *Stewart*, causing casualties, and flooding in the engine room. Apparently the first blow to land on the enemy was by *Tromp*, which soon after 2 a.m. hit *Oshio* forward of the bridge with gun fire and killed seven men. *Tromp* herself meanwhile suffered hits from *Oshio* in return. Shortly after, contact was lost with the Japanese ships, and the Allied force continued on north-eastwards.

Here more enemy ships were hastening to meet them. Kubo, with *Nagara* and his three destroyers, was 100 miles to the northwards in the vicinity of Sepandjang Island, one of the Kangean group. He himself was too far away to reach the scene in time, but he ordered *Arashio* and *Michishio* to leave their escorting of *Sagami Maru* and hasten southwards to help their fellow destroyers. They did so, and at 2.19 a.m. on the 20th they met the retiring Allied force head on, and opened fire on *Stewart* and *Edwards*. In a hot action of only a few minutes, in which both sides fired guns and torpedoes, *Michishio* was badly hit by *Pillsbury*, *Edwards*, and *Tromp*, so that she was immobilised (she was towed back to Macassar) and had 96 of her company killed and wounded. *Tromp* took punishment from *Arashio* at this stage of the proceedings. The Allied ships continued on to the north-east through Lombok Strait, cleared Bali by 3 a.m., and retired to Surabaya. No contact was made in the third phase of the operation because, according to Admiral Doorman in subsequent conversation with the commanding officer of U.S.S. *Edwards*,⁸ the Dutch motor torpedo boats which carried out this phase steamed right through the strait without sighting anything.

Once again a disappointing failure attended the Allied naval attempt to impose even slight delay on the advancing Japanese. Doorman tasted

⁸ Morison, *US Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. III (1948), p. 329. This source was drawn upon extensively in writing the above account of the Badung Strait action.

increasingly the bitter fruits of lack of tactical exercises and of adequate communication facilities in his heterogeneous force, and of misleading intelligence. It would seem that, based on the original reconnaissance reports, and on those of the bomber pilots who attacked the Japanese ships during the 19th, it was believed that numerically superior and more powerful Japanese forces would be met. This belief persisted after the action,⁹ and there would seem to be little doubt conditioned Doorman's mind and those of his commanding officers to an extent which gave the "tip-and-run" aspect of the attack undue prominence. The lack of tactical exercises denied to Doorman and his captains alike that mutual confidence and understanding which (especially in a night encounter) is half the battle in naval actions, most of which are affairs of the moment giving no opportunity for careful and detailed preparation but calling for the utmost flexibility of plan. In each of the Badung Strait encounters the Allied "wave" was numerically superior and more powerfully armed than the enemy, but the rigidity of the plan militated against success. Thus, because the enemy was first sighted to port, *De Ruyter*, with her guns trained to starboard, did not fire a shot.¹ The Japanese forces had the best of this, their first night action. *Michishio* was out of action for some months, but Doorman lost two ships as a result of the night's operations. *Piet Hein* was sunk; and *Tromp*, severely damaged by ten shell hits (one below the waterline), had to be sent to Australia for repairs.

The day after this night attack—on the 20th February—Admiral Helfrich stressed to General Wavell the impossibility of defending Java with his existing (and diminishing) naval forces. He asked that, if reinforcements could not be sent, the Anzac Force from the east and the Eastern Fleet from the west should carry out diversionary raids or demonstrations into or towards the Java Sea and China Sea to ease the situation. General Wavell was unable to grant this request because of the enemy's massive air superiority, which it was beyond Allied power to counter.

IV

While Doorman's forces were attempting to stem the Japanese invasion of Bali, the companion enemy operation—the invasion of Timor—was under way; and late in the night of the 19th February the assault convoys anchored off Dili and Koepang in readiness for pre-dawn landings. Japanese plans were carefully prepared, and the southern flank in this operation was secured in advance by devastating air raids on Darwin on the 19th. These effectively, if temporarily, removed any threat from that quarter as a base for immediate action in defence of Timor, or for attack against Japanese communications.

⁹ "Reconnaissance revealed that at least two cruisers and three transports were anchored in Badung Strait south-east of Bali—actual contact with this force was to reveal that it was far more powerful." (Walter Karig and Welbourn Kelley, *Battle Report, Pearl Harbour to Coral Sea* (1944).)

¹ Vice-Admiral G. W. Stoeve, RNN. "Operations of the RNN in the South-West Pacific during the Invasion of the Philippines, Malacca and the East Indies." *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, March 1950.

As stated above, the Allied Timor reinforcement convoy of four transports escorted by *Houston*, *Peary*, *Warrego* and *Swan*, left Darwin on 15th February. That same day a Japanese air striking force, Vice-Admiral Nagumo with *Akagi* and *Kaga* of the 1st Carrier Division and *Soryu* and *Hiryu* of the 2nd, with Vice-Admiral Kondo's supporting force, *Kongo* and *Haruna*, and *Takao* and *Atago*, and destroyers, left Palau for Staring Bay, the outer harbour of Kendari, Celebes, whence the carriers, escorted by the two heavy cruisers and destroyers, continued on southwards across the Banda Sea. On 17th February, while the Allied convoy was still at sea (though now bound back for Darwin) a Japanese convoy of nine transports carrying the 228th Infantry Regiment, left Ambon for Timor. It was escorted by Rear-Admiral Tanaka in *Jintsu*, with destroyers of the 2nd Flotilla. Rear-Admiral Takagi and his 5th Cruiser Squadron, *Nachi*, *Haguro*, and four destroyers, provided cover; and *Mizuho* of the 11th Seaplane Tender Division gave air support.

The Timor convoy left Darwin shortly before 2 a.m. on the 15th, and steamed westward. Course was well to the south of the direct route to Timor—indeed somewhat to the south of west—but even so, soon after 11 a.m., the convoy was sighted and shadowed by a Japanese four-engined flying-boat. Soon after 2 p.m., when the convoy was about ninety miles west of Darwin, the aircraft dropped some bombs, but did no damage. But the convoy's presence was reported. The night of the 15th was uneventful, and the convoy pursued its westerly course; but at 9.15 a.m. on the 16th a four-engined flying-boat again took up the shadowing. Two hours later, when they were about 300 miles west (and some forty miles south) of Darwin, convoy and escort were attacked by a force of thirty-six twin-engined bombers and nine four-engined flying-boats from Kendari. In spite of a series of determined attacks which lasted about an hour, none of the ships received a direct hit and only one of the convoy, *Mauna Loa*, suffered slight damage and two casualties, one fatal. The immunity of the convoy was largely due to the hot and accurate anti-aircraft fire, especially that from *Houston*, which did a magnificent job in protecting the convoy with a barrage which made her "like a sheet of flame".² Soon after midday the attacking aircraft withdrew.

At ABDA headquarters the presence of enemy aircraft carriers in the vicinity was suspected,³ which added to the impression that an invasion assault on Timor was imminent. It was felt certain that more attacks would be launched on the convoy, and General Wavell therefore ordered it back to Darwin. Course was reversed at 3.15 p.m. on the 16th, and Darwin was reached in the forenoon of the 18th. *Houston* and *Peary* were needed urgently by Doorman, and the two ships left Darwin again for Java later that day. *Houston* reached Tjilatjap on the 22nd February. *Peary* engaged in a hunt for a suspected submarine outside Darwin, and

² Morison, p. 315.

³ At 9 a.m. on 8 Feb, enemy fighter aircraft were reported over Dili. Soon after midday on 9 Feb an American bomber aircraft en route from Malang (Java) to Darwin, was attacked by three enemy fighter aircraft when about 200 miles WNW of Darwin.

used so much fuel that she had to return to the Australian base to replenish her bunkers. She entered Darwin early on 19th February. At dawn that morning Nagumo's carrier force reached its flying-off position in the Timor Sea approximately 220 miles north-west of Darwin, and the ships started launching their aircraft.

On the north-west corner of the squat, 400-mile wide peninsula which separates the Gulf of Carpentaria from the Timor Sea, Darwin is Australia's northernmost mainland port, and that nearest to Asia. The town stands on a low eminence on the eastern side of the capacious, deep water harbour which gives Darwin its value as a port.⁴ Within its entrance—seven miles across from East Point to West Point—the harbour reaches inland with bays and coves, and long arms of water fringed with mangroves, backed by low, wooded shores. In 1941 the port was connected by railway with Birdum, about 270 miles to the south-east, but thence the route was some 600 miles by poor roads to the southern railhead at Alice Springs. Thus Darwin's communications with the rest of the world were mainly by sea; both by coastal steamer services, and by occasional ships of lines running between Australia, Indonesia, Malaya, and the Far East.⁵

When war with Japan broke out in December 1941 Darwin had few facilities as a commercial port. There was one L-shaped wharf, with berthing accommodation for only two average-sized ships—558 feet in the outer berth, and 392 feet in the inner. Shore cargo handling gear consisted of two mobile handworked cranes—one of ten tons' and one of half a ton's capacity, and two mobile power-operated cranes, of three tons' and one-and-a-half tons' capacity respectively. Railway trucks could use the wharf, but not road transport. All cargo was slung from ships into railway trucks, which meant a very slow rate of handling. There were four privately-owned, self-propelled lighter-luggers, of 10 to 30 tons each; and two naval dumb lighters, each of 70 tons. Some naval store and water lighters arrived during 1941.

Port Darwin had been included by Admiral Henderson in the list of proposed naval bases in his *Recommendations* submitted to the Commonwealth Government in March 1911, but it was not developed on the scale he proposed. Admiral Jellicoe, in his Report of 1919, visualised the probable direction of any attack on Australia as from the north, so that "the naval forces of the Commonwealth should naturally be based in Northern Australian waters". He recommended that Bynoe Harbour, just to the westward of Darwin, should be developed as a temporary refuelling and storing base in the meantime. Nothing was done about Bynoe Harbour except to carry out a survey there in 1922.

⁴ Yet the depth of water could be accounted a disability. One of the reasons (given by the American submarine force commander) for withdrawing the tenders from Darwin to Tjilatjap was that if they were sunk by air attack in Darwin harbour the depth was such that it would not be possible to raise them.

⁵ In 1939 Burns Philp ran a monthly service Darwin-Melbourne via ports and Darwin-Singapore via ports, and an intermediate service of one passenger-cargo ship a month (*Marella*, 7,475 tons; *Merkur*, 5,952 tons; *Tulagi*, 2,300 tons; *Montoro*, 4,088 tons). The West Australian Government Steamship Service ran a fortnightly service, Fremantle, Derby, Wyndham, Darwin, for six months of the year, and a monthly service for the other six months, using the motor ships *Koolama*, 4,068 tons, *Koolinda*, 4,372 tons.

In 1924 the Australian Government inaugurated its five-year program of defence development which included the provision of 8,000-ton oil fuel tanks at Darwin. By 1936 this number was increased to nine completed tanks. Before then the need for defences at Darwin was recognised; the installation of coast-defence guns, and later of anti-aircraft guns, was approved; and in the early nineteen-thirties a District Naval Officer, with a small staff, was appointed to the port. In 1938 a military force (the Darwin Mobile Defence Force of 300 men) was raised and stationed at Darwin; and in 1939 a composite air force squadron was based at the civil airfield while work proceeded on an air force station some four miles from the town.

The civil affairs of Darwin, and of the Northern Territory, were controlled by an administrator appointed by the Australian Government. He was assisted by a Territorial Administration, and law and order were maintained by a fine body of police. From the outset Darwin suffered from the difficulty of grafting a military organisation on to a civilian population whose outlook and attitude were conditioned to a considerable degree by their isolation; by the "frontier" atmosphere; and by the tropical climate in which they lived. Labour troubles had long existed, and persisted during the two years of the European war while Darwin grew in importance as a base. The Communist-led North Australian Workers' Union held complete control over much of the labour, and wielded it in disruptive fashion. On 4th November 1939, the first of several troublesome and delaying strikes started when the railway employees stopped work, resulting in a shortage of all perishable foodstuffs. Then, as later, the navy and army had to take action in unloading supplies. Apart from strikes, work was at a slow tempo, and the entry of Japan into the war did little (until 19th February 1942) to effect an improvement.

Early in 1939, as the result of a recommendation of the Australian Defence Committee in January of that year, a local Defence Committee consisting of the senior officers of the three Services, was formed at Darwin. A representative of the Administration was appointed to the Committee to attend meetings when matters concerning civil activities were under discussion. The District Naval Officer then was Lieut-Commander Walker. He had held the appointment for just over a year when war broke out with Germany, and held it subsequently for another four months. The Committee prepared plans for local defence in a possible war, and took precautionary measures, so that when the War Telegram was received on 3rd September 1939, the Examination Service, Naval Control Service, and air reconnaissance patrols among other defence activities, immediately went into operation. Various longer-term naval developments were put in hand within a few weeks of the start of the war, including the installation of an indicator loop at the harbour entrance; the construction of boom defences including a boom jetty; and the installation of coastal and anti-aircraft guns. Plans were also put in hand for the extension of the commercial wharf.

The increasing importance of Darwin led to lifting of the senior naval post to that of Naval Officer-in-Charge, Northern Territory, and in January 1940 Captain Thomas took up the appointment. In February 1941 the Naval Board decided to send the submarine depot and repair ship H.M.A.S. *Platypus*⁶ to Darwin to act as base depot ship. *Platypus*, which since 16th August 1929 had been base depot ship at Sydney under the name *Penguin*, recommissioned as *Platypus* under Commander Bennett,⁷ and reached Darwin on 19th May.

By 30th June 1941 Darwin's nine oil fuel tanks carried stocks of 62,401 tons, and two additional tanks of 12,000 tons capacity were being built. They were completed by 30th September 1941, on which date the naval complement totalled 891 officers and men. On 2nd November a floating dock, towed from Brisbane by two tugs, arrived at Darwin and was moored 900 yards to the southward of the commercial jetty. By 31st December 1941, the naval strength at Darwin was 1,105 officers and men. Army and Air Force strengths were also built up during 1940 and 1941, the army (in addition to coastal defence and fortress command troops) to a brigade plus supporting arms, and the air force to some 2,000 officers and men in the area.

In December 1941 the War Cabinet approved a recommendation by the Advisory War Council that women and children (other than missionaries and nurses) should be compulsorily withdrawn. The first withdrawal was in *Zealandia*, which left Darwin for Sydney with 207 women and 357 children on 20th December 1941. Three days later the American ship *President Grant* (14,119 tons) followed her bound for Brisbane with 225 on board. Subsequent movements were by *Montoro* with 203 for Sydney on 9th January 1942; and *Koolama* and *Koolinda* for Fremantle on 25th January and 14th February respectively. On 19th February some 2,500 civilians remained in Darwin, comprising public servants, civil air staff, municipal employees, wharf labourers, and a small business community mainly of Chinese and people of Southern European descent.

During January and February there were evidences of enemy activity in the sea and air around Darwin. On 1st January inward and outward crossing signatures on the indicator loops were considered "almost certainly" caused by an enemy submarine; and other submarines were sighted—including that destroyed by *Deloraine* and American destroyers on 20th January. Mines were reported in both entrances to Dundas Strait during late January and early February, and on 11th February four Japanese moored mines which had broken adrift were washed ashore in Darwin's northern approaches. Dundas Strait was closed to shipping, and all vessels to or from the east were routed to the west of Bathurst Island. Japanese air reconnaissance over the Timor Sea by four-engined flying-boats became extensive, and was regular over the western approaches to Darwin.

⁶ HMAS *Platypus* (1917), 3,455 tons, one 4.7-in gun, 15.5 kts.

⁷ Cdr H. T. Bennett, DSO; RAN. Comd HMAS *Platypus* 1941; DEMS Staff Officer 1942-46. Of Sydney; b. Musselburgh, Scotland, 21 Feb 1888.

By the middle of February there was a fair concentration of ships in Darwin, though departures earlier in the month reduced the number somewhat. As the intended main base of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet the port saw an influx of U.S. naval units and auxiliaries. Combat ships, including submarines, were in and out; but base ships intended to stay there were the submarine tenders *Holland* and *Otus*; the destroyer tender *Black Hawk*; and the seaplane tenders *Langley*, *William B. Preston*,⁸ and *Heron*.⁹ These all arrived early in January, as did the oilers *George G. Henry* (6,265 tons) and *Trinity*. The American decision to shift their rear base from Darwin to Fremantle resulted in the departure for Tjilatjap of *Holland*, *Otus*, *Black Hawk* and *Trinity* on 3rd February to service submarines and aircraft based there. *Heron* followed them on the 10th; and next day *Langley* sailed for Fremantle, there to embark fighter aircraft for India; she was accompanied by *George G. Henry*. On 19th February the only U.S. naval vessels remaining in Darwin were the destroyer *Peary* and the seaplane tender *William B. Preston*. There were four American transports and merchant ships—*Meigs*, *Mauna Loa*, and *Portmar* of the returned Koepang convoy; and *Admiral Halstead* (of the original *Pensacola* convoy) which reached Darwin on 18th February loaded with drums of aviation petrol intended for the Philippines. One tanker with oil fuel to replenish the Darwin tanks was there—the British vessel *British Motorist* (6,891 tons); and the Australian ships *Tulagi*, *Zealandia*, *Neptuna* (5,952 tons) and *Barossa* (4,239 tons). *Neptuna's* cargo included material for the extension of the boom, and 200 tons of depth charges; *Barossa* was loaded with timber for wharf extensions. Australian naval vessels present included the depot ship *Platypus*; the sloops *Swan* and *Warrego*; the corvettes of the 24th Minesweeping Flotilla (*Katoomba* was in the floating dock, repairing damage suffered in a collision with the U.S. oiler *Pecos* on the 23rd January); the boom working vessels *Kookaburra*, *Koala*, *Kangaroo* and *Karangi*; the gate vessel *Kara Kara*;¹ *Tolga*, *Terka*, and *Gunbar*; and various channel patrol boats and small craft. Originally bound for Singapore, but now in Darwin awaiting instructions, was the hospital ship *Manunda*.

The concentration was largely due to the poor working conditions in Darwin delaying the unloading. These conditions were aggravated in early February by a cyclone which reached Darwin on the 2nd and for six days made harbour work impossible. In an effort to speed up the work (as only two ships were able to use the wharf simultaneously) ships in the stream were, where possible, unloaded into lighters and small harbour craft, which in turn discharged at the uncompleted boom jetty and improvised landing places on the beach, so as to avoid congestion at the wharf. Lack of space at the wharf, where was the pipe line for ships to water, necessitated the withdrawal of *Tolga* and *Terka* from minesweeping duties to act as water

⁸ *William B. Preston*, US seaplane tender, ex-destroyer (1919), 1,190 tons, two 4-in guns, 26 kts.

⁹ *Heron*, US seaplane tender, ex-minesweeper (1918), 840 tons, two 3-in guns, 14 kts.

¹ HMAS *Kara Kara*, boom gate vessel (1926; requisitioned 1941), 525 tons, one 12-pdr gun, 11 kts.

carriers to ships at anchor. Of this, the N.O.I.C. (Commodore Pope²) remarked: "These vessels proved invaluable for this purpose, each being capable of supplying 200 tons of water. Without them the situation would have been chaotic with the extremely limited berthing facilities."

Thursday, the 19th February 1942, dawned bright and clear over Northern Australia and adjacent waters. There was a light westerly breeze; a blue sky in which sailed a few fine weather clouds; a smooth sea. Visibility was extreme. The sun, rising over the Arafura Sea and driving the night shadows westward, touched to sparkling life the Timor and Banda Seas, and patterned with brightness and shadow the scattered islands reaching down towards the Australian mainland. Away in the southern reaches of the Banda Sea it shone on Rear-Admiral Tanaka's Timor assault convoy steaming towards its objective. A little over 100 miles south-east of Timor's easternmost point it struck reflections from Nagumo's carriers, turning into the wind to fly off their aircraft for the attack on Darwin. Some 150 miles south-east again it painted the green and chocolate shores of Bathurst Island and limned in the offing to the westward two Filipino ships, *Florence D* (2,638 tons) and *Don Isidro* (3,200 tons) which had been stealing northwards in an attempt to run the Philippines blockade. Away to the westward, roughly at the western base of an equilateral triangle whose eastern base was Darwin and northern apex Nagumo's carrier force, it picked out *Houston*, hastening towards Tjilatjap to join Doorman.

That morning in Darwin the normal activities of the base proceeded. At the boom, the main portion of which was nearing completion, *Kara Kara* and *Kookaburra* were in position as western and eastern gate vessels respectively; and also in the boom's vicinity were the other three boom working vessels; the patrol craft *Coongoola*;³ and the examination steamer *Southern Cross*.⁴ The two auxiliary minesweepers *Tolga* and *Gunbar* were nearby. Work was proceeding at the wharf, where *Barossa*, with an oil lighter alongside, occupied the inner berth and *Neptuna* the outer, of the outer leg. H.M.A.S. *Swan* was secured alongside *Neptuna*. Some half a mile to the southward of the wharf was the floating dock, with *Katoomba* inside. *Platypus* was not far distant, with the lugger *Mavie*⁵ alongside, and *Deloraine* was also in the dock's vicinity. Fringing the town side of the harbour northwestward from the floating dock, *Zealandia*, *Manunda*, and *British Motorist* were at anchor in that order, *Zealandia* exercising her ship's company at boat drill. Outside these lay *Portmar*, *Meigs*, and *Mauna Loa*, with *Tulagi* farther over to the westward. These four ships of the Koepang convoy had disembarked their troops. Other ships, including *Peary* and *William B. Preston*; *Warrego*, with working parties over the side

² Rear-Adm C. J. Pope, CBE; RN 1902-19; transferred RAN 1919. (HMAS *Sydney* 1914-19.) Comd HMS *California* 1939-41; NOIC Darwin 1942, Fremantle 1943-46. Of Sydney; b. Tring, Herts, Eng, 2 Mar 1887. He succeeded Captain Thomas as NOIC Darwin on 23 Feb 1942.

³ HMAS *Coongoola*, patrol craft (requisitioned 1941), 34 tons, one .5-in Browning and one Vickers, 9 kts.

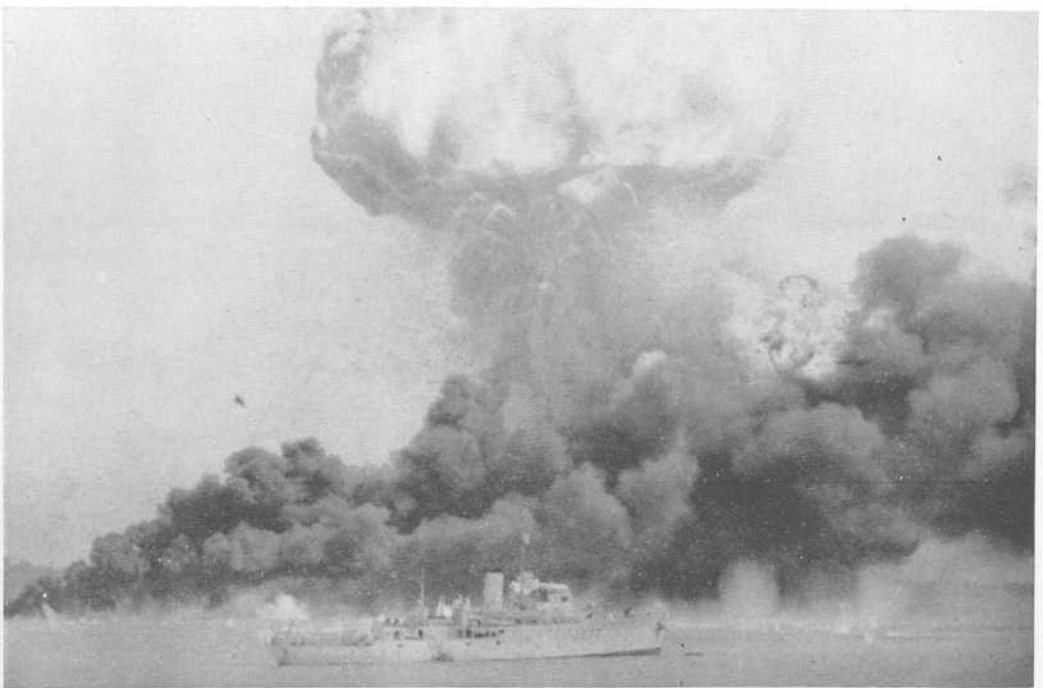
⁴ HMAS *Southern Cross*, examination vessel (1933; requisitioned 1941), 298 tons, one 4-in gun, 8 kts.

⁵ HMAS *Mavie*, lugger (1903), 14 tons; sunk by Japanese aircraft 19 Feb 1942.



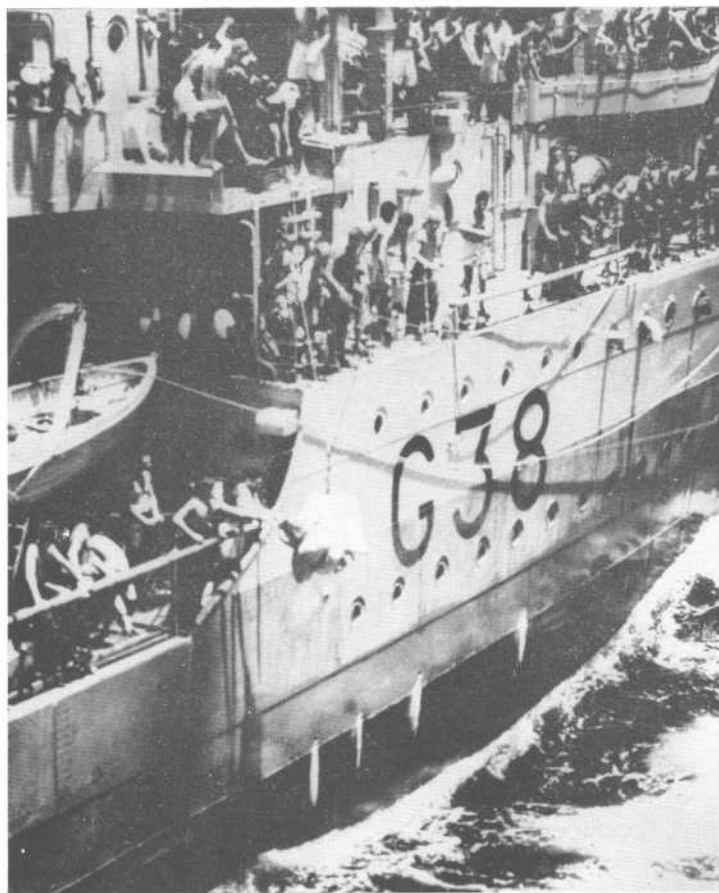
(Cdr J. C. B. McManus, R.A.N.)

Darwin, 19th February 1942. Railway Jetty during Raid. *Barossa* and *Neptuna* alongside.



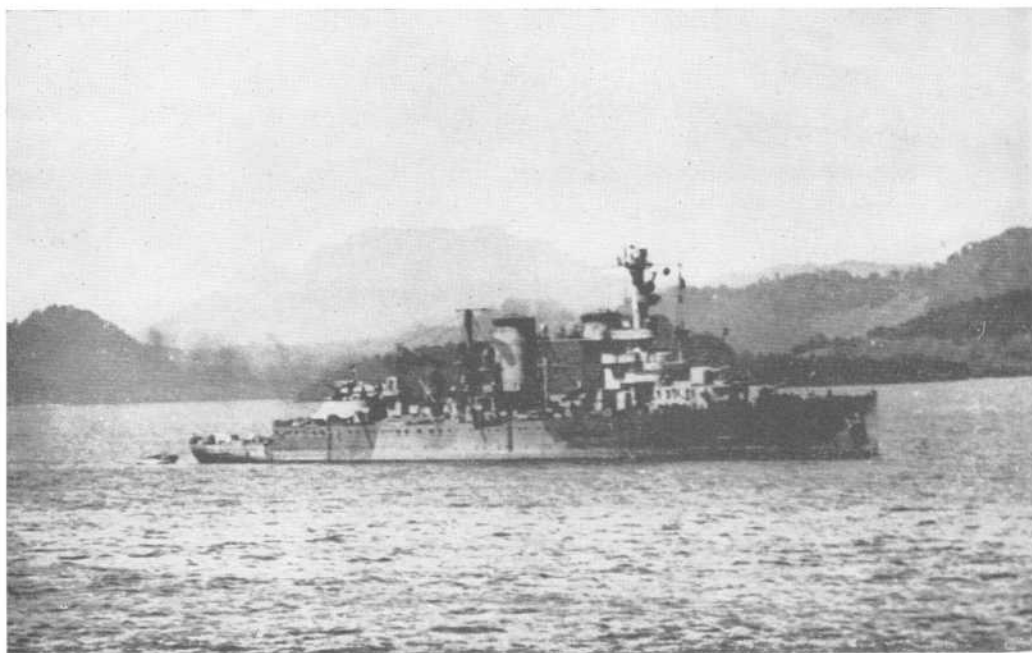
(Telegraphist R. Belbin, R.A.N.)

Darwin. Oil Tanks on Fire. H.M.A.S. *Deloraine* in foreground.



H.M.A.S. *Nizam* alongside
H.M.A.S. *Manoora*, in
Indian Ocean, transferring
Stores, 4th March 1942.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)

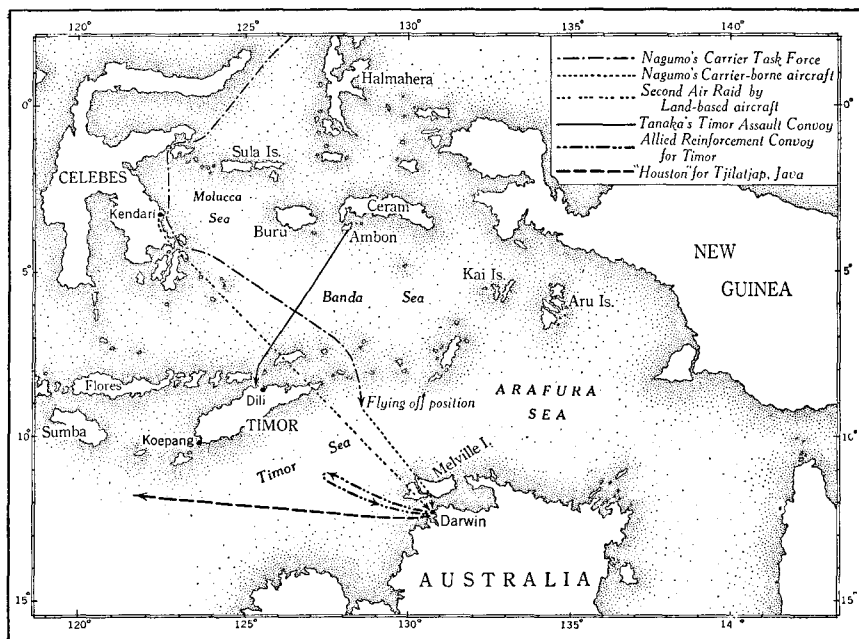


(R.A.N. Historical Section)

chipping and scraping; the corvettes and twenty or so tenders and small craft, were in various anchor berths round the harbour.

At 9.15 a.m., ten American Kittyhawk fighter aircraft took off from Darwin for Koepang. Less than twenty minutes later they received an adverse weather report from Darwin, and their leader decided to return. Just about that time aborigines at the Bathurst Island mission station sighted the formations of Nagumo's aircraft heading south, and a report was teleradioed to Darwin from the mission station. The returning Kittyhawks reached Darwin and five of them landed to refuel. The other five remained aloft to patrol over the harbour. About 9.45 a.m. the leading Japanese aircraft arrived, and four of the patrolling Kittyhawks fell immediate victims to the enemy fighters leading the attack. The fifth (after shooting down one fighter and two dive bombers) landed safely, but was destroyed during the second enemy raid later in the day. The five which had landed were destroyed as they attempted to take off when the Japanese arrived.

The first Japanese air attack on Australia was (according to analysis of observers' reports) apparently delivered by 81 carrier-borne aircraft,⁶



27 each high-level bombers, dive bombers, and fighters. Apparently the fighters opened the attack, both on the patrolling Kittyhawks and on ships in the harbour. *Gunbar* was passing through the boom gate, and later reported:

⁶ But a Japanese account, "Invasion of the Dutch East Indies", ATIS, 14 May 1948, says the carriers attacked with entire force, "36 fighters, 71 carrier bombers, 81 carrier attack planes".

At 9.57 a.m. nine fighter aircraft attacked, giving in all eighteen separate attacks from ahead, astern, and starboard. The Japanese used armour-piercing, tracer, and common ammunition. The first run hit our single Lewis gun, rendering the ship defenceless. At 10.10 the attacks finished.

Including the commanding officer, Lieutenant Muzzell,⁷ nine of *Gunbar's* company (one of whom subsequently died) were wounded in this attack. Muzzell though hit in both knees and in considerable pain, refused to leave the bridge until the ship was brought to an anchor after the all clear. The two gate ships were also attacked by gun fire, as were the boom defence vessels and other craft in the vicinity of the boom, and two fatal casualties were among those suffered in *Kara Kara*, and one in *Kangaroo*.

Within a minute or so after the fighters' attack on *Gunbar*, the first bombs fell. They were released from 14,000 feet by high-level bombers, which had deviated to port on their approach, swung in a wide circle, and came in over the back of the town from the south-east. The defence alarm sirens sounded at 9.58 a.m., as the bombers reached their release point, and a few seconds later columns of water leapt from the harbour near the wharf, to the flash and roar of bomb explosions. Bombs hit the wharf near the shore end, blew a railway engine and trucks over the side together with some wharf labourers, shattered water and fuel oil pipe lines; and destroyed a span of the wharf, thus trapping a number of surviving wharf labourers who were clustered at the elbow. These men were later rescued by Qantas and civil aviation launches. Then the explosions moved along the shore—to the hospital, the post office, the police barracks and the government offices. Hot on the initial high-level bombing came the olive-green dive bombers, attacking singly or in small groups of two or three, and working havoc in the harbour.

The ships that could do so got under way—*Swan*, *Warrego*, *Peary* and *William B. Preston* were among them—and all with armament fought back with vigour, adding the crash of gun fire and exploding shells to the shattering din of aircraft engines, the clatter of machine-guns, and the thunder of bomb explosions which reverberated across a sky stained with the smoke of shell bursts and the pall of destruction. To the smoke clouds from burning buildings on shore was added that from the wharf, where *Neptuna* and *Barossa* were on fire from direct hits, and oil from the broken pipe line was blazing. Within a few minutes *Peary* was fatally hit; *Swan* was heavily damaged from a near miss; and a number of the merchant ships were on fire and sinking. *Zealandia* was one of the last attacked, and in her brief interval of immunity before a bomb smashed through No. 3 hatch and exploded in the hold, her master, Captain Kerr,⁸ called for volunteers and sent boats away on rescue work. Ten minutes after the first bomb fell, Mr Minto,⁹ Chief Officer of *Manunda*, saw from that ship's bridge that

⁷ Lt-Cdr N. M. Muzzell, VRD; RANR(S). Comd HMAS's *Gunbar* 1940-42, *Ararat* 1943-45. Of St Kilda, Vic; b. London 6 Jun 1904.

⁸ Capt R. Kerr. Master mariner; of Seaforth, NSW; b. Scotland, 1883. Died 15 Feb 1949.

⁹ Capt T. Minto, Chief Officer of *Momba* 1939, *Manunda* 1939-43; Master of *Aldinga* 1943-45. Master mariner; of Sydney; b. Carlisle, Scotland, 19 May 1907.

the wharf was burning near its inner end; *Barossa* and *Neptuna* at the wharf both appeared to have been hit and *Neptuna* was on fire. *British Motorist*, off our bow, was sinking by the head. *Meigs* was on fire aft and sinking. *Mauna Loa* was down by the stern with her back broken. *Tulagi* was nowhere in sight. *Portmar* was in trouble. . . . An American destroyer ablaze aft [*William B. Preston*, destroyer converted to seaplane tender] went dashing across our bows, missing us by inches and steering with her engines. Another American destroyer [*Peary*] was on our port side, a solid mass of flame with burning oil all round her and what was left of the crew jumping into the burning oil. We manned our motor life-boat with four of a crew and went to their rescue and eventually picked up over thirty badly burnt and wounded men.

Southern Cross also rescued some of *Peary's* people. The destroyer, her steering gear demolished by a hit on the stern, and set ablaze by a second bomb amidships, sank by the stern with her bow gun still in action. Her captain and all officers except one, together with about eighty of her crew, lost their lives.

At this time *Manunda* was still unharmed, and was getting other boats away to help survivors. But her turn came with an attack by dive bombers. First she was rocked by a near miss which "killed four on board and put seventy-six holes and over a hundred deep scores in our plating overside and played hell with our gear and upperworks",¹ and then by a direct hit which started seven fires (one serious), wrecked the after end of the bridge, did severe internal damage, and caused many casualties. As a result of these two bombs *Manunda* had nine crew and three military staff (including a nurse) killed, and some forty-seven injured, seven seriously. She continued to function as a hospital ship, and during the day wounded were taken to her in her own boats and naval launches.

Undoubtedly the ship losses and casualties would have been heavier but for the deterrent effect on the attacking pilots of the anti-aircraft fire. *Platypus* fought back hard, and though near-missed three times and machine-gunned, and with *Mavie* alongside her sunk, escaped with damage in the engine room which immobilised her for some time. *Katoomba*, too, fought off a dive bomber which attacked the dry dock, and caused him to miss. On shore the comparative immunity of the oil tanks was secured by an army machine-gun party on Stokes Hill, overlooking the tanks. Their gun fire effectively distracted the aim of a dive bomber pilot who made an attack on the tanks, only two of which received slight damage.

Small craft generally gave every help they could to stricken ships. Besides helping *Peary's* survivors, *Southern Cross* took wounded from *Portmar*, now beached, and then gave a hand to *Admiral Halstead*, damaged by near misses. *Zealandia* swung to the tide and brought the light breeze aft, causing the fire to sweep forward through the accommodation. She was soon ablaze fore and aft with uncontrollable fires, and "abandon ship" was ordered. *Tolga*, *Terka*, and motor patrol boats went to give what help they could to her crew; and *Tolga* later took survivors from the burning and sinking *British Motorist*. The naval tug *Wato*²

¹ Minto report.

² HMAS *Wato*, tug (1904; commissioned 1941), 292 tons, two Vickers, 11.5 kts.

ran in to the burning wharf and towed the oil lighter clear from *Barossa*, and was towing *Barossa* off when *Neptuna's* 200 tons of depth charges went up in the greatest explosion of the raid. The Administrator, Mr Abbott,³ recorded how he

saw the explosion, and the vast cloud of black smoke shot with flames into the sky. The explosion shook the whole town and blew the ship to pieces. The stern and engines went down near the wharf and the bow floated for a few minutes, turned on its side, and then sank.⁴

Barossa was beached near by, and her cargo burnt out.

There was some difference of opinion among observers as to how many dive bombers took part in this first Darwin raid, some thinking that eighteen, not twenty-seven, were present. The raid was just over when Wyndham radio intercepted a distress message, "Am being attacked by aircraft", from *Don Isidro* off Bathurst Island. It may be that one squadron of nine dive bombers was detached from the Darwin force en route to deal with her and *Florence D*, leaving eighteen to carry on to Darwin. Be that as it may, both the Filipino ships were destroyed by dive bombers. *Don Isidro* received five direct hits, and was beached on fire north of Cape Fourcroy, the south-western extremity of Bathurst Island. *Florence D* sank off the island's north-west coast. Seventy-three survivors of *Don Isidro* were picked up by *Warrnambool* on the 20th February. *Warrnambool* was bombed during this operation by a four-engined flying-boat, but without damage or casualties. A number of survivors from *Florence D* made overland to the Bathurst and Melville Island mission stations, and were taken to Darwin in the mission lugger *St Francis*. On the 23rd *Warrnambool* rescued a number of survivors of *Florence D*, and the crew of a crashed Catalina.

This first enemy attack on Australia's mainland lasted less than one hour; and before 11 a.m. the raiders had gone and the all clear had been sounded. There was a second raid, by fifty-four land-based bombers from Kendari, without fighter escort, which reached Darwin about midday; but their attack was concentrated on the R.A.A.F. airfield. There remained, after the initial attack on the harbour and town, a scene of devastation; of sunken and sinking and burning ships, and a wrecked and burning wharf; of demolished and blazing buildings in the town and at the airfields, both air force and civil; of injured and shattered people; and of the dead, both in the town and along the foreshore where a grisly collection of charred human remains began to collect. Probably around 250 people were killed⁵ of whom the majority, about 170, were in ships in the harbour, where the heaviest losses were in *Neptuna* and *Peary*. In ships of the R.A.N. seven⁶ lost their lives, three in *Swan*; two in

³ Hon C. L. A. Abbott. (1st AIF: Lt 12 LH Regt.) MHR 1925-29, 1931-37, Min for Home Affairs 1928-29; Administrator, Northern Territory, 1937-46. Pastoralist; b. Sydney 4 May 1886.

⁴ C. L. A. Abbott, *Australia's Frontier Province* (1950), p. 83.

⁵ Some figures were approximate. Losses in *William B. Preston*, for example, were given as "several".

⁶ *Swan*: Signalman A. J. Breen, AB A.S. Purdon, Ldg Seaman J. Sault; *Kara Kara*: Ldg Cook F. B. Emms, PO F. Moore; *Gunbar*: OD H. J. Shepherd; *Kangaroo*: Cook N. R. Moore.

Kara Kara; and one each in *Gunbar* and *Kangaroo*. Some 40 or so R.A.N. personnel were wounded out of a total wounded of around 320. On the wharf 21 civilians were killed, and 14 in the town. More than 50 merchant seamen were killed (*Neptuna's* death roll was 45); and the U.S. Navy suffered heavily in *Peary*, with about 80 killed. *Peary* was sunk; and the merchant ships *British Motorist*; *Neptuna*; *Zealandia*; *Mauna Loa*; and *Meigs*. Also sunk were the naval craft H.M.A. Ships *Mavie* and *Kelat*.⁷ *Barossa* and *Portmar* were beached but later salvaged; and *Tulagi* beached but soon refloated and little damaged. Damaged to a greater or less degree were the merchant ship *Admiral Halstead*; the hospital ship *Manunda*; U.S.S. *William B. Preston*; and H.M.A. Ships *Platypus*; *Swan*; *Gunbar*; *Kara Kara*; *Kookaburra*; *Kangaroo*; and *Coongoola*. Away off Bathurst Island *Don Isidro* was beached, a total loss; and *Florence D.* sunk.

Those in H.M.A. Ships in the harbour, with their minds and hands occupied in fighting back and in rescue work, quitted themselves well, as did most of those naval men based on shore; but Commodore Pope reported that "after the raid the morale of a certain proportion of the personnel was regrettably low and a few of them had to be sent south with 'anxiety neurosis' in various degrees". As Pope remarked:

This measure was not wholly due to a tender solicitude for the health and feelings of persons who deserve no consideration, but it was necessary to remove them as it is well-known that such a state is contagious. The first raid was of course sudden and very severe on the harbour and waterfront, and it was perhaps a hard test on many men who had never really seen war in any form to meet it suddenly and unexpectedly in that way.

The raid led to a redistribution of forces, and the shifting of Army and Air Force Headquarters away from the Darwin Peninsula, which, recorded the Darwin Naval Base War Diary for the period of January-March 1942,

became a Fortress Area. . . . The defence of a section of the peninsula has been assumed by the Navy and although little time is available with many harbour commitments, the erection of barbed wire defences and digging of trenches and the training of personnel in land fighting has been commenced. With the real threat of invasion, activity has been intensified, and the Army has taken up battle stations. Field artillery and anti-tank guns have been placed in position and the construction of numerous landing strips has commenced. Sailings to Darwin are now resuming with the introduction of a shuttle service between Cairns and Darwin. The formation of an Army Dock Operating Company under army discipline and control will solve the unloading problem which has always been a bugbear in Darwin. Inefficient civilian labour should not be tolerated in any place where inefficiency, delays and friction impede the war effort and directly or indirectly cost lives.

The now even more limited unloading facilities in Darwin, and the increased enemy air activity over northern waters, made it appear unnecessarily risky in the opinion of the Naval Board and the Shipping Control Board, to sail merchant ships of any size to Darwin. It was therefore decided to establish a shuttle service of small ships between Cairns and

⁷ HMAS *Kelat*, coal hulk (1881; requisitioned 1941), 1,849 tons; sunk by Japanese aircraft 19 Feb 1942.

Darwin, and a number were taken up early in March.⁸ Darwin at this period lost one of its regular traders through this enemy air activity. The M.V. *Koolama*, bombed on 20th February by a four-engined flying-boat in Joseph Bonaparte Gulf, west of Darwin, was beached on the shores of the gulf, but refloated on 1st March. She reached Wyndham on 2nd March, and next day, during an air raid, sank alongside the jetty.

The Japanese lost five aircraft plus five probables in the raid. It is of interest that the first Japanese prisoner of war in Australia was captured as a result of the raid—by aborigines on Bathurst Island on 21st February. He was from a crashed bomber. On 3rd March another five were captured on Bathurst Island. They were survivors from *Myoken Maru* (4,124 tons), torpedoed by U.S.S. *Swordfish* in the Molucca Sea on 24th January.

Its mission completed, Nagumo's carrier task force returned to Staring Bay, where it remained until 25th February. Meanwhile Timor was invaded according to the Japanese schedule, and the Allied garrisons at Koepang and Dili subdued. There could be little resistance at Dili, where the main landings were completed by dawn on the 20th, and the airfield was secured that day. At Koepang the Japanese had a tougher fight. The main assault force landed from the sea south of Koepang at dawn on the 20th, and about 10.45 a.m. a force of 308 naval paratroops flown in transport aircraft from Kendari, were dropped north of Koepang. They were reinforced by another 323 paratroops the next day. On the 22nd, after suffering heavy casualties, the Japanese joined forces at the airfield, and next day the greatly-outnumbered Dutch and Australian defenders capitulated. By then aircraft of the Japanese base air force were already using the airfield. The Japanese invasion did not, however, end the story of Timor in the war. An Australian independent company at Dili and survivors from Koepang, took to the hills, where for more than a year they waged active guerilla warfare. They built a wireless set with which they managed to establish contact with Australia whence they eventually received supplies by sea in small ships from Darwin; and with the help of many of the local people they were, until eventually withdrawn, a constant source of trouble to the Japanese occupation forces.

But the occupation of Timor in February 1942 set the stage for the final act in the Japanese plan of conquest in Indonesia. Cut off from Australia in the east; surrounded and isolated in the west; open to the north to enemy-dominated sea and sky; Java was now ripe for the harvest. The Japanese marshalled their forces for the attack.

V

On the 20th February, the day after the first Darwin air raids, the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington told General Wavell that Java should be defended with the utmost resolution by all available combatant

⁸ *Babinda* (659 tons); *Katoora* (327); *Kurimarau* (288); *Mamutu* (300); *Alagna* (730); *Matafele* (335); *Muliana* (689).

troops. "Every day gained is of importance. There should be no withdrawal of troops or air forces of any nationality, and no surrender." He was told to augment the defence of Java with available naval forces, and with U.S. aircraft at his disposal assembling in Australia, but that Burma had been removed from his command and once again placed under the control of India, and that land reinforcements on the way from the west would not go to Java but were being diverted to augment the defence of Burma, Ceylon, and Australia, points vital to the continuance of the war against Japan. Next day this order was modified to the extent that air forces which could more usefully operate in battle from bases outside Java, and such troops as were not defending the island, should be withdrawn. Wavell was told that his headquarters was to leave Java, when and where he might decide.

It was at this juncture that, as stated above, Vice-Admiral Helfrich told Wavell that he could not defend Java with the existing naval forces, and asked that the Anzac Force from the east and the Eastern Fleet from the west should carry out diversionary demonstrations in strength into or towards the ABDA Area, which request Wavell had to refuse on the grounds of air inferiority. He could have added naval inferiority also. Even with the attachment (after the fall of Rabaul) of Vice-Admiral Wilson Brown's *Lexington* carrier group to Vice-Admiral Leary's Anzac Force, that force was markedly inferior to Japanese strength in the ABDA Area; while the British Eastern Fleet was still in the slow process of formation. Apart from the small *Hermes*, only one British carrier was then east of Suez: *Indomitable*, which, escorted by *Napier* and *Nestor*, was two days east of Aden, bound for Port Sudan after her aircraft-ferrying trip to Java. The Eastern Fleet's only modernised battleship, *Warspite*, was in Sydney, where she arrived on 20th February on her way to Colombo after being repaired in the United States. The Eastern Fleet as then constituted in the Indian Ocean consisted only of one or two old "R" Class battleships and a few cruisers and destroyers, mainly employed in covering and escorting the A.I.F. convoys on their way to Australia from the Middle East. As it happened, however, the Anzac Force did stage a demonstration—and on the very day Helfrich asked for it—though against Rabaul, too far east to divert Japanese naval strength from Java.

The incident resulted from Leary's acceptance of a proposal by Wilson Brown to carry out a heavy air strike on Rabaul. In cooperation with Wilson Brown's force—Task Force 11—the functions of the Anzac Squadron were:

To seek out and destroy inferior enemy forces, remaining on the defensive and acting as a stop gap force until such time as the area could be reinforced. To retire at all times in the face of superior enemy forces, particularly those including aircraft carriers, and generally in a north-easterly direction with the object of gaining air support from Fiji and general support from Task Force 11. And to ensure the safe arrival of U.S. convoys and generally give cover support for trans-Pacific movements.

The squadron operated in the area Noumea-Suva, with Suva as its advanced operational base, whence it sailed escorting the U.S. tanker *Platte*,⁹ in the afternoon of 18th February. It comprised H.M.A.S. *Australia*, flag of Rear-Admiral Crace; U.S.S. *Chicago*; H.M.N.Z. Ships *Leander* and *Achilles*; and the American destroyers *Perkins* and *Lamson*. Its mission was to escort the tanker to a rendezvous where Task Force 11—consisting of *Lexington*, flag of Vice-Admiral Brown, *Minneapolis*, *Indianapolis*, *Pensacola*, *San Francisco*, and ten destroyers—could refuel after the air attack on Rabaul. Strict wireless silence was kept, but in the morning of the 20th, during its approach to the flying-off position east of Rabaul, Task Force 11 was sighted by Japanese reconnaissance aircraft from Rabaul, and during the afternoon was attacked by two waves each of nine aircraft. Most of the attackers were shot down in air combat over the Task Force, which suffered no damage and lost only two defending aircraft, but surprise was lost and the attack on Rabaul was abandoned. Two days later, by agreement between Brown and Crace, it was decided that they should both operate in the Coral Sea, and that the Anzac Squadron should thenceforward regard Noumea as its advanced operational base. The two admirals felt that Port Moresby, New Caledonia, Fiji, and the Ellice Islands, in that order of priority, were the probable next objectives of the Japanese in the east; and on 23rd February Brown wrote to Crace:

I agree with you as to the enemy's probable objectives and that our strongest position is in the Coral Sea, from where we should be able to detect and oppose any move in force. I also agree that we should concentrate our naval strength so far as fuel needs will permit. It is unfortunate that we must be so hampered by that primary requirement. It was only in order that you might have sufficient fuel at the appropriate time that I suggested the Suva-Noumea area as your general theatre of operations rather than cruising habitually as support with this Task Force.

The reference to the fuel problem was in connection with Crace's chafing at being relegated to tanker escort during a combat operation.

On 24th February, Admiral Halsey's *Enterprise* task force raided Wake Island. Two heavy cruisers and two destroyers bombarded for thirty minutes, and at dawn next morning *Enterprise* launched thirty-six bombers and six fighters which attacked the island. No effective damage was done and one dive bomber with its crew was lost.

The immediate Japanese objective however, and one from which such operations were not to divert them, was Java; and while Task Force 11 fought off the air attack east of Rabaul, two large Japanese assault convoys, between 2,000 and 3,000 miles to the westward, were sailing for Java from Camranh Bay in Indo-China, and Jolo in the Philippines, respectively. The army commander was General Imamura, who sailed with the western, Camranh Bay, force. The naval responsibility for the entire operation was that of Vice-Admiral Takahashi, Commander-in-Chief of the *Third Fleet*. The Japanese were aware of the existence in the Java Sea of Allied naval forces approximating five cruisers and eight destroyers,

⁹ *Platte*, US tanker (1939), 8,000 tons, four 5-in guns, 18 kts.

but did not plan to "seek out and destroy" this force before launching the assault, because of "the need of using all ships for escort duty". Instead, they employed covering forces with each assault group, and "adopted plan of waiting in readiness to meet the move" of the Allied force.¹

Takahashi, with two heavy cruisers, *Ashigara* and *Myoko*, and destroyers *Akebono* and *Inazuma*² under his direct command, gave general cover. The western force, of fifty-six transports carrying HQ XVI Army, the 2nd Division, and 230th Infantry Regiment, escorted by Rear-Admiral Hara with light cruisers *Yura* and *Natori* and destroyers of the 3rd and 5th Flotillas, left Camranh Bay on 18th February. The light fleet carrier *Ryujo* provided the air group, and the 2nd Base Force took part in the operation. Close cover was given by Rear-Admiral Kurita's 7th Cruiser Squadron—*Mikuma*, *Mogami*, *Suzuya* and *Kumano*. Units of this group were apparently sighted in the vicinity of the Anambas Islands on 23rd February, when Allied reconnaissance reported one *Atago* class, two *Mogami* class, and one *Natori* class cruisers there, with some transports and tankers.³

The eastern assault group, of forty-one transports carrying the 48th Division, was under the command of Rear-Admiral T. Takagi who gave cover with the 5th Cruiser Squadron and Rear-Admiral Tanaka's 2nd Destroyer Flotilla, and was escorted by Rear-Admiral Nishimura in *Naka*, with *Asagumo*, *Minegumo*,⁴ *Murasame*, *Samidare*, *Harusame* and *Yudachi*⁵ of the 4th Destroyer Flotilla. The convoy left Jolo on 19th February. It called in at Balikpapan to embark the 56th Regimental Group (less the detachment which had captured Bandjermasin) and sailed thence on the 23rd.

On 20th February the defenders in Java learned of the concentration at Jolo of "between 80 and 100 ships", and concluded that the invasion of Java was in preparation. They anticipated that enemy assaults would be made on both ends of the island, and for that reason (reinforced by the purely technical consideration that storage of oil fuel, which was in short supply, was divided between Surabaya and Tanjong Priok) Vice-Admiral Helfrich decided on the 21st to divide his available surface forces into eastern and western striking groups until the Japanese plans became clear. Already in Surabaya was Doorman's force just back from the Badung Strait action—*De Ruyter*, *Java*, and the U.S. destroyers *Edwards*, *Parrott*

¹ From Japanese account: "Invasion of the Dutch East Indies", ATIS translation.

² Japanese destroyers (1931-32), 1,700 tons, six 5-in guns, nine 24-in torp tubes, 34 kts; *Akebono* sunk in Manila Bay 13 Nov 1944, *Inazuma* off Tawi Tawi 14 May 1944.

³ One Japanese report said that Takahashi asked for a postponement of the attack on Java for two days "because of the fact that there were three large cruisers, five medium cruisers and eight destroyers of the English Fleet in the Java Sea". When this request was approved by the Army, the Third Fleet reversed its course to north at a point 1°24'N, 107°55'E (120 miles SE of the Anambas Islands) and sailed for approximately 24 hours, and on the 23rd turned and headed south once more.

⁴ *Asagumo*, *Minegumo*, Japanese destroyers (1938), 1,500 tons, six 5-in guns, eight 24-in torp tubes, 34 kts; *Asagumo* sunk in Surigao Strait 25 Oct 1944, *Minegumo* in Kula Gulf 6 Mar 1943.

⁵ Japanese destroyers (1937), 1,368 tons, five 5-in guns, eight 24-in torp tubes, 34 kts; *Murasame* sunk in Kula Gulf 6 Mar 1943, *Samidare* off Palau 26 Aug 1944, *Harusame* NW of Manokwari 8 Jun 1944, *Yudachi* off Savo Island 13 Nov 1942.

and *Pillsbury*—and the Dutch destroyers *Witte de With*⁶ and *Kortenaer*,⁷ which last-named had come round from Tjilatjap.

Based on Tanjong Priok, and engaged in escorting the “SJ” convoys clearing ships thence, were the British cruisers *Exeter*, *Dragon*, *Danae*, and the Australian *Hobart*, and the destroyers *Electra*, *Encounter*, *Jupiter*, *Scout*, *Stronghold*, and *Tenedos*. That day, the 21st, Helfrich made to the ships under his command the signal:

I inform all officers and ships' companies that the situation is critical. I wish to impress upon all of you the necessity for every effort against the enemy to prevent his landing on Java. Every opportunity for offensive action must be seized and all sacrifices must be made to this end.

On 24th February both eastern and western groups were reinforced. The eastern was joined by U.S.S. *Houston* and the American destroyers *Paul Jones* and *Alden*, which left Tjilatjap on the 22nd and sailed west about via Sunda Strait to Surabaya; and by *Ford*, which, with *Pope*, had been sent to Australia for torpedoes. The western group gained *Perth* from Australia. Helfrich had been promised the 6-inch gun cruiser U.S.S. *Phoenix*, but she never entered the ABDA Area, although at the time on her way there escorting a convoy from Fremantle.

As stated above, the “no surrender of Java” order to Wavell on 20th February, told him that land reinforcements originally intended for the island were being diverted for the defence of Burma, Ceylon, and Australia. The decision so to divert reinforcements arose from a suggestion made by Wavell himself when, on 16th February, in a message to Mr Churchill, he said that Japanese landings on Java in the near future could only be prevented by local naval and air superiority, and that it was most unlikely that this could be obtained. Wavell continued:

Burma and Australia are absolutely vital for war against Japan. Loss of Java, though a severe blow from every point of view, would not be fatal. Efforts should not therefore be made to reinforce Java which might compromise defence of Burma or Australia.

He considered that sending to Java the Australian Corps then on its way there from the Middle East was a “risk unjustifiable from tactical and strategical point of view”. He recommended that, instead, the Australian troops in transit should be sent to Burma. With this Churchill agreed, and on the 20th told Wavell that President Roosevelt's mind was “turning to United States looking after the Australian flank, and we concentrating everything on defending or regaining Burma and Burma Road, of course after everything possible has been done to prolong the resistance in Java”.

⁶ *Witte de With*, Dutch destroyer (1929), 1,316 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 36 kts; destroyed at Surabaya to avoid falling into enemy hands 2 Mar 1942.

⁷ *Tromp* and USS *Stewart*, both damaged in Badung Strait, were also at Surabaya; but *Tromp* sailed for Australia for repairs, and *Stewart*, in drydock, capsized through faulty shoring, and was wrecked by a demolition charge on 2nd March. The Japanese salvaged her and used her in the war, and she was subsequently recovered by the Americans. Also there was the Dutch destroyer *Banckert*, but she was damaged in an air raid on the port on 24th February, and was scuttled by the Dutch on the 2nd March. She was subsequently refloated by the Japanese. But *Parrott* and *Pillsbury* were withdrawn from the Eastern Striking Force by Glassford, “since they had practically no torpedoes left and were sadly in need of overhaul”.

The Prime Minister concluded by suggesting that Wavell should again become Commander-in-Chief, India, "if forced to leave Java".

If the leading ships carrying the Australians were to be diverted to Burma, swift action was necessary, and on 20th February Churchill cabled to the Australian Prime Minister seeking agreement to the proposed change. His request was fortified by a similar one from Roosevelt; and, assuming a favourable response, Churchill diverted the convoy. The favourable response was not forthcoming. In a telegram on the 22nd, Mr Curtin outlined Australia's contribution to the Allied defence in the Far East and stated that the Australian Government felt:

in view of the foregoing, and the services the AIF have rendered in the Middle East, that we have every right to expect them to be returned as soon as possible, with adequate escorts to ensure their safe arrival. We assure you, and desire you so to inform the President, who knows fully what we have done to help the common cause, that if it were possible to divert our troops to Burma and India without imperilling our security in the judgment of our advisers we should be pleased to agree to the diversion.

To this decision the Australian Government adhered after learning (with some indignation) of the diversion of the leading ships towards Rangoon, and on the 23rd Churchill told Curtin: "Your convoy is now proceeding to refuel at Colombo. It will then proceed to Australia in accordance with your wishes."⁸

In the meantime the Americans had reorganised their ideas regarding the disposal of their forces against the Japanese. During the middle weeks of December 1941, they had visualised using Australia as a base whence to reinforce the Philippines. But before the end of the month President Roosevelt realised that there was little likelihood of such reinforcements reaching the Philippines; and that matter was soon settled by the Japanese investing the islands. On 14th February came an abrupt change in the United States War Department policy, when a proposal by Brigadier-General Eisenhower⁹ of General Marshall's staff to send a brigade plus 10,000 service troops to Australia, was revised by the staff to one division and 8,000 service troops—which proposal was agreed to by General Marshall.

Hitherto Australia had been put to limited use as a staging point for American aircraft, and air force troops and equipment bound for the ABDA Area and India; and U.S.S. *Phoenix* reached Melbourne on 1st February escorting the American transports *Mariposa* (18,017 tons) and *President Coolidge* (21,936 tons), with ground troops for a fighter group bound to India. It was intended that *Mariposa* and the transport *Holbrook*

⁸ In a broadcast in July 1955, recalling some incidents during his term of office as Clerk of the House of Representatives, Canberra, Mr Frank Green told how, walking through the grounds of the Prime Minister's Lodge early one morning in February 1942, he found Mr Curtin walking about in the darkness, and asked him why he did not get much needed sleep. Mr Curtin replied: "I have taken the responsibility of bringing one of our divisions back to defend our north. How can I sleep when their transports are in the Indian Ocean in danger from enemy submarines?"

⁹ General of Army Dwight D. Eisenhower. C-in-C Allied Forces in N Africa 1942-43; Supreme Cdr Allied Forces, European Theatre 1944-45; C of S US Army 1945-48; Supreme Cdr N Atlantic Treaty Forces 1950-52; President of the United States of America since 1953. B. 14 Oct 1890.

(one of the original *Pensacola* convoy which had remained in Australia) should form convoy "MS.5", to carry these American reinforcements on, escorted by *Phoenix*; but *Mariposa* was withdrawn, and her place was taken by the Australian transports *Katoomba* and *Duntroon*; and thus constituted convoy "MS.5" left Melbourne on 12th February.

The convoy offered a means of getting urgently needed fighter aircraft to Java, and the U.S. aircraft tender *Langley* was ordered from Darwin to Fremantle to embark thirty-two aircraft flown over from eastern Australia, and there to join the convoy, together with the American ship *Seawitch*, carrying twenty-seven crated aircraft. "MS.5", with *Langley* and *Seawitch* in company, left Fremantle on 22nd February. Arrangements had been made for a British cruiser of the Eastern Fleet to take over escort from *Phoenix* in the vicinity of Cocos Island, and for the American cruiser then to escort *Langley* and *Seawitch* to Tjilatjap, there to land their aircraft. But time was the essence, and the day after "MS.5" left Fremantle, Helfrich ordered *Langley* and *Seawitch* to detach from "MS.5" and proceed independently at best speed for Tjilatjap. They thus left *Phoenix*, which continued on with the convoy until the 28th February, when she was relieved by H.M.S. *Enterprise*, approximately 300 miles west of Cocos Island. It was then too late for *Phoenix* to join the ABDA Area, and she returned to Fremantle, where she arrived on 5th March, the day that *Enterprise* and "MS.5" reached Colombo.

Another ship intended for duties in the Java area, but which was too late, was the Australian sloop *Warrego*. The day after the Darwin air raids she sailed from that port escorting her damaged sister *Swan* through Clarence Strait, after which she resumed anti-submarine patrol off Darwin. On the 23rd February Commodore Collins asked that she be sent to Batavia, and she sailed from Darwin for that port via Sunda Strait on the 25th.

On that day the ABDA Command was dissolved. On 22nd February Wavell discussed the withdrawal of his headquarters from Java with the Governor-General of the Netherlands East Indies, Jonkheer Dr van Starkenborgh Stachouwer, who thought that withdrawal after invasion would damage public morale, and that, as an alternative command organisation was already in existence, it would be better that the ABDA Command should be dissolved, and not withdrawn. Wavell agreed, and in a message to the Chiefs of Staff advanced this view, pointing out that since the control of Burma had reverted to India, ABDA held little to command, and that the local defence of Java could be better exercised under the original Dutch organisation. The Chiefs of Staff concurred, and General Wavell accordingly dissolved his command at noon on the 25th February, and that night left by air for Ceylon to again take over as Commander-in-Chief, India, to which post he had been appointed by Churchill on the 22nd. In Java, the British forces now came under the orders of the Dutch Commanders-in-Chief: Vice-Admiral Helfrich, who ceased to be "Abda-float", and resumed his former Dutch title of *Commandant der Zeemacht* ("C.Z.M."); Lieut-General ter Poorten; and Major-General van Oyen, the Dutch Air Officer Commanding. Rear-Admiral Palliser remained as

Senior British Naval Officer; Rear-Admiral Glassford continued in charge of the United States naval forces under Helfrich's direction; and Commodore Collins was in command of the British naval forces.

The 25th February was a date of destiny in the ABDA Area. In the morning intelligence was received of a large Japanese convoy and strong escort moving down Macassar Strait. This confirmed a report of the previous day from an aircraft which had seen a "fleet to the northward" in Macassar Strait before being shot down by the Japanese. A definite threat having thus materialised in the east, Helfrich (who, since his total forces were inadequate to attempt to oppose invasion convoys at each end of the island, had decided to concentrate against one) at 11.25 a.m. ordered all available fleet cruisers and destroyers at Tanjong Priok immediately to reinforce Doorman at Surabaya. He excluded *Danae* and *Dragon*, and the destroyers *Tenedos* and *Scout* as being unsuited for action against modern ships because of lack of speed; and *Stronghold* was south of Java escorting *Ashridge*. Collins accordingly dispatched H.M. Ships *Exeter*, *Electra*, *Jupiter*, *Encounter*, and H.M.A.S. *Perth* from Tanjong Priok at 3 p.m. on the 25th. It was intended that *Hobart* should also join Doorman, but she was unable to do so, because the bomb-damaged auxiliary, *War Sirdar*, could not fuel her in time. Helfrich also disposed such submarines as he had so as to cover as far as possible the exit from the Strait of Macassar, and the line Macassar-Bali. Only eleven were available—six American and five Dutch.¹ The rest of the American boats were too widely dispersed to concentrate in time.

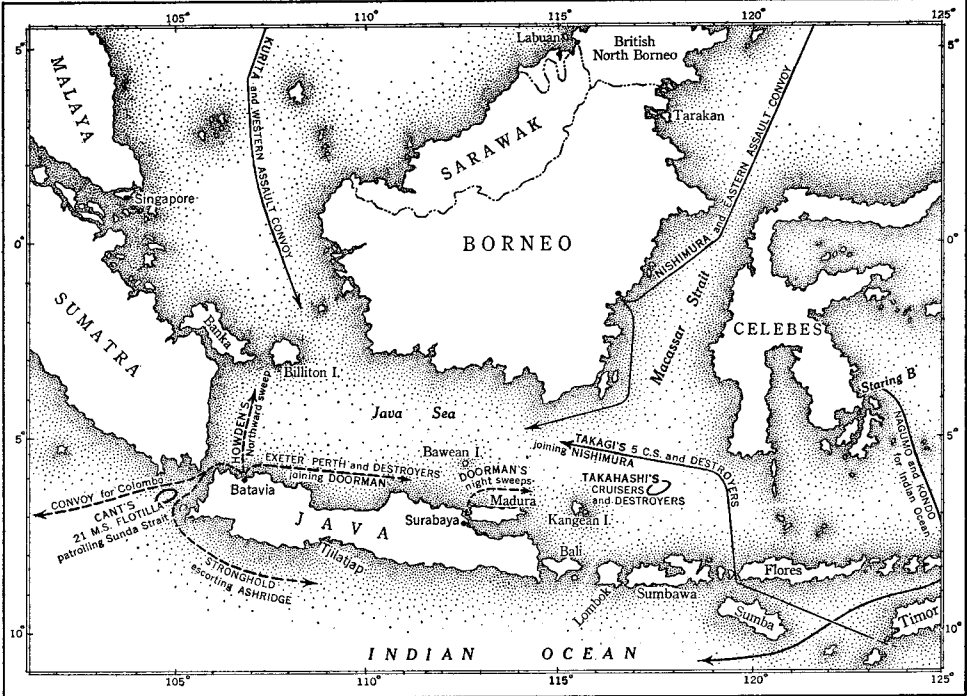
On the 25th a small advanced Japanese force landed from destroyers on Bawean Island, about 90 miles north of Surabaya, and there set up a wireless station which was shelled, with unknown result, by the U.S. Submarine *S 38*. There were Japanese movements farther east. Rear-Admiral Tanaka's 2nd Destroyer Flotilla—*Jintsu* (flag), with *Yukikaze*, *Amatsukaze*, *Tokitsukaze* and *Hatsukaze*²—which had been supporting the Timor operation at Koepang, left there on the 24th "and hurriedly steamed towards Macassar to meet with the 4th Flotilla for refuelling".³ Also in the vicinity was Rear-Admiral Takagi's 5th Cruiser Squadron, which had covered the Timor operation, 8-inch cruisers *Nachi* (flag) and *Haguro*, with destroyers *Sazanami*, *Yamakaze*, *Ushio* and *Kawakaze*.⁴ And, coming down from Celebes, from Staring Bay, which it left on the 25th, was Vice-Admiral Nagumo's carrier task force—*Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Soryu*, *Hiryu*; with the 1st Division of the 3rd Battle Squadron, *Hiyei* and *Kiri-shima*; the 8th Cruiser Division, *Tone*, *Chikuma*; light cruiser *Abukuma*;

¹ These were Helfrich's figures as given in his "Unpublished Notes".

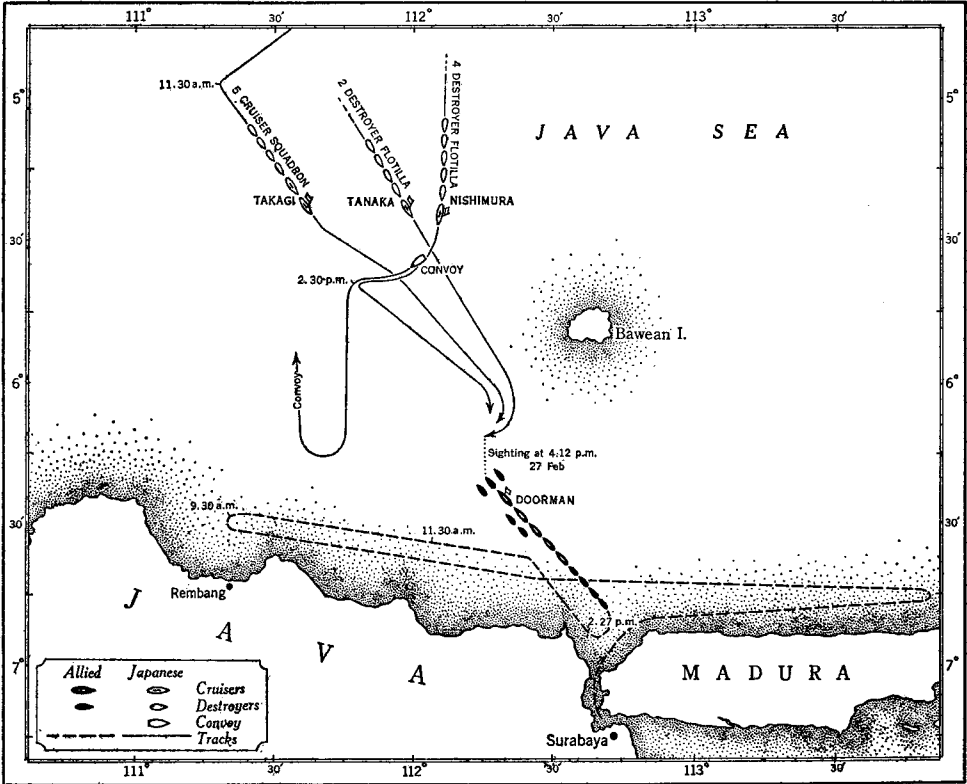
² Japanese destroyers (1940), 1,900 tons, six 5-in guns, eight 24-in torp tubes, 36 kts; *Yukikaze* heavily damaged 30 Jul 1945, *Amatsukaze* destroyed 6 Apr 1945, *Tokitsukaze* sunk 3 Mar 1943, *Hatsukaze* sunk 2 Nov 1943.

³ Japanese document: "Naval Battle Offshore Surabaya" (1953).

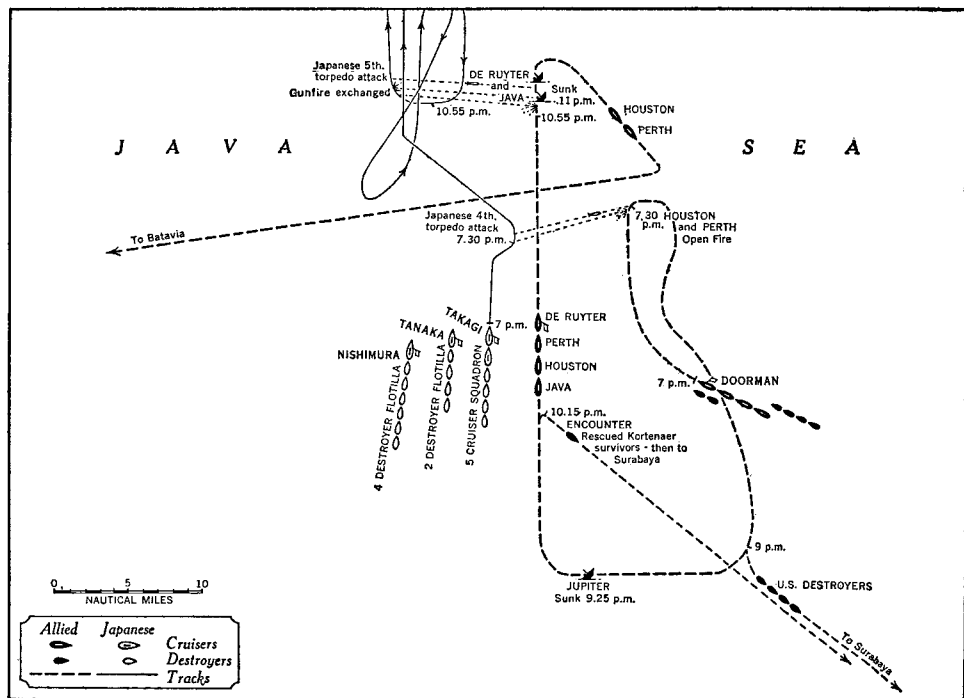
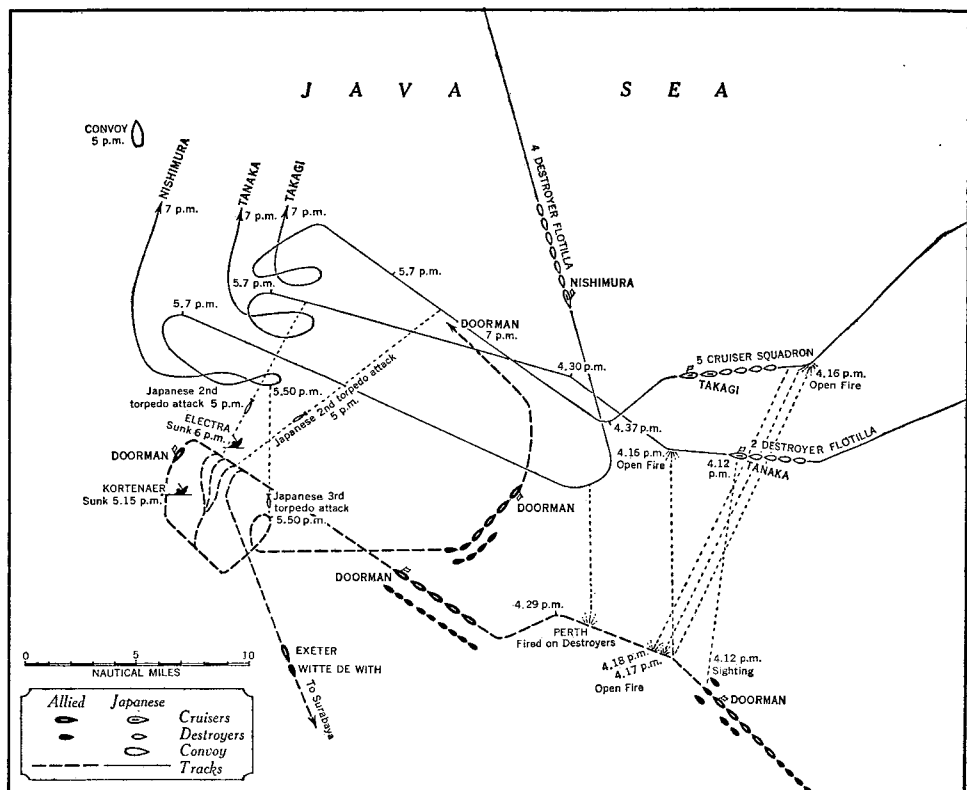
⁴ *Sazanami*, *Ushio*, Japanese destroyers (1931-32), 1,700 tons, six 5-in guns, nine 24-in torp tubes, 34 kts; *Sazanami* sunk 14 Jan 1944, *Ushio* heavily damaged 14 Nov 1944, *Yamakaze*, *Kawakaze*, Japanese destroyers (1937), 1,368 tons, five 5-in guns, eight 24-in torp tubes, 34 kts; *Yamakaze* sunk 25 Jun 1942, *Kawakaze* sunk 6 Aug 1943.



Prelude to Java Sea Battle. Situation on 25th-26th February 1942



The Opening Phase



and destroyers *Tanikaze*, *Isokaze*, *Hamakaze*, *Urakaze*, *Shiranuhi*,⁵ *Kasumi*,⁶ *Ariake* and *Yugure*;⁷ with six supply ships. This force, which was bound for the Indian Ocean with the double purpose of cutting off the retreat of Allied ships and preventing the arrival of reinforcements, was followed the same day, from Staring Bay (where he had arrived a few days after Nagumo got there from his attack on Darwin) by Vice-Admiral Kondo, with heavy cruisers *Atago* (flag), *Takao*, and *Maya*; the battleships *Kongo* and *Haruna*; and destroyers *Arashi*, *Nowaki* and *Hayashio*.⁸ This force acted as support and cover to Nagumo.

Looking, then, over the Java Sea scene on 25th February 1942, we see in the west the Camranh Bay group of 56 transports, with its escort of two light cruisers and destroyers of the 3rd and 5th Flotillas, and its covering group of four heavy cruisers of the 7th Squadron, descending upon western Java; where Allied forces based on Tanjong Priok (apart from a few escort vessels and the corvettes of the Sunda Strait Patrol), comprised three light cruisers (two of which were old) and two old destroyers. In the east, the Jolo group of 41 transports, covered and escorted by two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and fourteen destroyers, was moving down on central and eastern Java. Away to the east of the Kangean Islands was Takahashi, with two more heavy cruisers and two destroyers. To oppose this assault was Doorman with one heavy and two light cruisers, and six destroyers at Surabaya; while two more cruisers, one heavy and one light, and three destroyers, were hastening eastwards from Tanjong Priok to join him. Farther east, the powerful Japanese carrier task force and supporting force were steaming south for Ombai Strait and the Indian Ocean. Farther afield still, *Warrego* was just leaving Darwin, heading westward. Away to the south, some 500 miles south of Tjilatjap and heading north for that port, were *Langley* and *Seawitch* with their cargoes of urgently-needed fighter aircraft for Java. Another 500 miles or so south by west from *Langley*, convoy "MS.5" and *Phoenix* were heading north-west across the Indian Ocean for Colombo, where the leading convoys of the great "Stepsister" movement carrying the A.I.F. back from the Middle East were steaming south-eastward for Australia. Such ships of the Eastern Fleet, and other British naval units as were available in the Indian Ocean, were fully employed in escorting these valuable convoys. And, heading southwards for Australia and north-westwards for Ceylon, such ships as could get away from Java were making for safety.

Both the Japanese and the Allied High Command correctly assessed the situation. The Japanese had air and surface control of the seas north and south of Java; and in consequence nothing the available Allied naval forces

⁵ Japanese destroyers (1940-41), 1,900 tons, six 5-in guns, eight 24-in torp tubes, 36 kts; *Tanikaze* sunk 9 Jun 1944, *Isokaze* and *Hamakaze* 7 Apr 1945, *Urakaze* 21 Nov 1944, *Shiranuhi* 27 Oct 1944.

⁶ *Kasumi*, Japanese destroyer (1938), 1,500 tons, six 5-in guns, eight 24-in torp tubes, 34 kts; sunk 7 Apr 1945, off Kyushu.

⁷ Japanese destroyers (1935), 1,368 tons, five 5-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts; *Ariake* sunk 28 Jul 1943, *Yugure* 20 Jul 1943.

⁸ Japanese destroyers (1940-41), 1,900 tons, six 5-in guns, eight 24-in torp tubes, 36 kts; *Arashi* sunk 6 Aug 1943, *Nowaki* 25 Oct 1944, *Hayashio* 24 Nov 1942.

could do could prevent the invasion of the island. At the best, they could inflict some damage and impose some delay on the invasion forces; and that was a risk the Japanese were justified in accepting. For their part, the Allies decided to fight to the end with the Dutch in Java. Though no hope of victory there remained, time won would be invaluable in helping the strengthening of defences in Burma, India, and Ceylon. The keynote was that sounded by the British Prime Minister in a message he sent on 26th February to Air Vice-Marshal Maltby,⁹ in command of the British air forces in Java:

I send you and all ranks of the British forces who have stayed behind in Java my best wishes for success and honour in the great fight that confronts you. Every day gained is precious, and I know that you will do everything humanly possible to prolong the battle.

VI

It was estimated that the enemy convoy reported on the 25th could, at a speed of 12 knots, reach the north coast of Madura Island next morning. Doorman therefore did not await the arrival of his reinforcements from Tanjong Priok, but sailed with his three cruisers and six destroyers at dusk on the 25th, and swept eastward along the coast of Madura. He sighted nothing, and on the morning of the 26th returned to Surabaya, where he was joined by the ships from Tanjong Priok. Actually the Japanese, that day, were still some 200 to 250 miles to the north of Surabaya, off the south-east point of Borneo, where Takagi with his *5th Cruiser Squadron*, and the *2nd Destroyer Flotilla*, joined up with Nishimura and the convoy. As the destroyer flotilla came within visibility of the convoy, it was attacked by two Allied aircraft, which reported thirty Japanese transports, two cruisers and five destroyers, 25 miles north-west of Arends Island (about 180 miles north-east of Surabaya) at 11.55 a.m.¹ on the 26th. Meanwhile, also on the 26th, an enemy convoy of thirty transports escorted by four cruisers and three destroyers was reported in the western Java Sea, moving south in the vicinity of Banka Island; and both Doorman in the east, and a Western Striking Force, formed on *Hobart*, with *Dragon*, *Danae*, *Scout* and *Tenedos* in the west, sailed to try and intercept the respective enemy groups. Owing to poor communications, Doorman did not get the report of the eastern group until 4.15 p.m. He thought that, lacking air reconnaissance, he would be more certain to intercept the Japanese near the coast than by searching for them in the open sea to the north. He therefore left Surabaya at 6.30 p.m. with his entire force of five cruisers and nine destroyers, and throughout the night of the 26th-27th repeated his earlier sweep to the eastward along the coast of Madura. At 1 a.m. on the 27th he reversed course, and continued westward until 9.30 a.m., when he was off Rembang, about 90 miles west of Surabaya.

⁹ AVM Sir Paul Maltby, KBE, CB, DSO, AFC; RAF. (1914-18: Royal Welsh Fusiliers and RAF, in France.) AOC 24 Gp 1938-40, 71 Gp 1940-41, RAF in Java 1942. B. 5 Aug 1892.

¹ Times here quoted are local Java time, being G.M.T. plus 7½ hours. The Japanese ships kept Tokyo time—G.M.T. plus 9 hours—but their quoted times have been (with allowances for discrepancies other than those of longitude) adjusted to bring them in line with Java time for the purposes of this account.

Half an hour earlier enemy aircraft had attacked, with seven bombs which fell close to *Jupiter*, and from then on the force was continuously shadowed. Lack of air cover imposed a constant strain on the crews, and again a resemblance to the Crete campaign conditions showed itself. Nine months earlier, Cunningham told the Admiralty:

the effect of recent operations on personnel is cumulative. Our light craft, officers, men and machinery alike, are nearing exhaustion. . . . It is inadvisable to drive men beyond a certain point.

Now, shortly after noon on the 27th February, Doorman reported to Helfrich:

This day the personnel reached the limit of endurance; tomorrow, the limit will be exceeded.

At 2.27 p.m. on the 27th, Doorman was entering Surabaya, without having made contact with any enemy surface vessels.

At just about the same time, the Western Striking Force was entering Tanjong Priok after a fruitless sweep in search of the western enemy convoy. *Hobart* and her consorts left Tanjong Priok at 9.15 p.m. on the 26th and steamed north about 90 miles until 3 a.m., when they reversed course. Forty-five minutes later a signal from Collins told Captain Howden, in *Hobart*, Senior Officer of the force, of Japanese ships reported 55 miles north of him. As it would not be possible to establish contact before dawn, Howden decided to continue south and await results of dawn reconnaissance. At 8 a.m. on the 27th Howden turned north again for an hour, intending to attack if reconnaissance disclosed an enemy not overwhelmingly superior, but to withdraw to the eastward and join Doorman if the odds were too great.² However, no further sightings south of Banka were reported, and the Western Striking Force thereupon returned to Tanjong Priok, where it arrived at 2.20 p.m., after being bombed by eight aircraft and near-missed, with slight damage to *Hobart* and five of her ratings wounded.

As the two striking forces returned to their respective bases, away in the Indian Ocean some 75 miles south of Tjilatjap, the American aircraft tender *Langley* was reaching her journey's end. She had been detached from Convoy "MS.5" ahead of *Seawitch*, and at 7 a.m. on the 27th was approaching the south coast of Java escorted by the U.S. destroyers *Whipple* and *Edsall*, sent out from Tjilatjap to meet her. It was a perfect morning, with few high clouds in scattered formations, a gentle north-east wind, and extreme visibility. At 9 a.m. a Japanese reconnaissance aircraft appeared; and about two and a half hours later came bombing attacks by nine aircraft of the *11th Air Fleet*, shore-based in Celebes. In a third attack, *Langley* received five direct hits, and was soon blazing in a series

² Discussing this after the war, Helfrich ("Unpublished Notes") said that he had intended *Hobart* to join Doorman, but that when she had fuelled in Tanjong Priok on the 26th February he had expected a battle in the Java Sea, and "deemed a trip on her own to Surabaya out of the question . . . but had I known that Doorman's intention was to make a sweep again along Madura in that night, I certainly had ordered *Hobart* to join Doorman in the morning of the 27th".

of fires. These were quickly out of control, and at 1.32 p.m. "abandon ship" was ordered; and all but eleven of the ship's complement were picked up by the destroyers, after which *Whipple* sank the crippled ship by gun fire. *Langley*—a converted collier and the U.S. Navy's first aircraft carrier—went down 75 miles south of Tjilatjap. *Edsall* and *Whipple* proceeded at high speed for Christmas Island, there to trans-ship survivors to the U.S. naval tanker *Pecos*. *Seawitch* reached Tjilatjap safely on the morning of the 28th, and landed her crated aircraft too late for them to be of any use. They were destroyed in their crates when Tjilatjap was abandoned.

At 11.30 a.m. on the 27th the Japanese eastern convoy, escorted by the *4th Destroyer Flotilla*, was about 40 miles north-west of Bawean Island, steering south-west. The *2nd Destroyer Flotilla* was 40 miles to the N.N.W. and Takagi's two heavy cruisers about 60 miles to the north-west of the convoy, when an aircraft of the *11th Air Fleet* reported Doorman's force some 60 miles south of the convoy, steering south-east. Takagi ordered the convoy and escort to the westward, while he and the *2nd Destroyer Flotilla* hastened south-eastwards on converging courses. The Japanese, and the deployment to the south-east, were observed by an Allied aircraft, whose report, passed on to him by Helfrich, reached Doorman at 2.27 p.m. as he was entering Surabaya.

Doorman at once turned his force and proceeded to sea again to seek and attack the convoy. As soon as he cleared the Surabaya minefield, formation was taken with the three British destroyers ahead in line abreast five miles apart, *Jupiter* to port, *Encounter* to starboard, and *Electra* in the centre. Four miles astern of *Electra*, *De Ruyter* (flag) led the cruisers in line ahead in the order *Exeter*, *Houston*, *Perth*, *Java*. Five miles astern of *Java*, *Edwards* led the four American destroyers, with *Alden*, *Ford*, *Paul Jones*, in that order. The two Dutch destroyers, *Witte de With* and *Kortenaer*, in line ahead, were out on the port beam of the cruisers. There was a gentle north-east wind; a sky with but few clouds; and the force sped over a slight sea at 24 knots towards the north-west horizon, which was sharp in extreme visibility.

Meanwhile the Japanese kept the Allied force under aerial reconnaissance, and on a report by a float-plane from *Nachi* that Doorman had entered Surabaya, the convoy resumed its southward course. This was stopped when Doorman's reversal of course was reported, and at about 2.30 p.m. the *4th Destroyer Flotilla* left the convoy and hastened south-east to join the other two Japanese forces, so that all three were steering converging courses, with the *4th Flotilla* farthest west; the cruiser squadron in the centre; and the *2nd Flotilla* farthest east. Speed was 24 knots. Takagi entered the combat area with the initial advantage of aerial reconnaissance³ which enabled him to deploy his forces favourably for his first contact. He obliquely crossed the Allied line of advance before sighting, and then altered course to the south-west, with *Jintsu* and the

³ *Jupiter* reported sighting three float-planes to the northward a few minutes before the Japanese surface vessels were sighted.

2nd Flotilla hauling ahead of the cruisers, while *Naka* and the *4th Flotilla* were some six miles W.N.W. of *Jintsu*. Thus the first sighting of the Japanese, by *Electra* at 4.12 p.m., was of *Jintsu* and the *2nd Flotilla* fine on the starboard bow, distant about ten miles, and crossing from starboard to port. Within the next two or three minutes *Nachi* and *Haguro* showed up to the north-east of the *2nd Flotilla*. During this time Doorman increased speed to 26 knots and held his north-west course, closing the range, which at 4.16⁴ p.m., when the Japanese opened fire, was about 28,000 yards for the heavy cruisers, shooting at *Exeter* and *Houston*; and some 18,000 for *Jintsu*, with *Electra* as her target. The Japanese were in position to "cross the T" of the Allied line, and Doorman now led round to port, to W.N.W., still closing the range, but not sufficiently for other than *Exeter* and *Houston* to reply to the enemy cruisers, which they did, opening fire at 4.17 and 4.18 respectively. At 4.25 *Perth* opened fire on destroyers which seemed to be moving in to attack.⁵ They were probably the ships of the *4th Flotilla* which, speeding south at 35 knots, crossed ahead of the Japanese heavy cruisers and astern of the *2nd Flotilla* before altering to the westward. They thus closed the Allied force, which at 4.29 altered course to W.S.W., parallel to the Japanese.

Numerically as to ships, the opposing forces were not ill-matched. Each side had two 8-inch gun cruisers. The Allies had three 6-inch gun cruisers to the Japanese two 5.5-inch gun ships; and nine destroyers to the Japanese twelve or fourteen. But in fire power the Japanese had a great advantage. Their 8-inch gun ships were more heavily gunned than the Allied, in addition to which *Houston's* after triple turret was out of action, so that the Japanese opposed twenty 8-inch guns to the Allied twelve. In light cruisers the Allies had twenty-five 6-inch guns to the Japanese fourteen 5.5-inch weapons; though on the other hand the Japanese destroyers opposed some seventy 5-inch guns to the Allied sixteen 5-inch and twenty 4.7-inch. But it was in torpedoes—in the development and use of which they were well advanced—that the Japanese had the great superiority in what was to prove the decisive weapon in the battle. Their four cruisers mounted between them thirty-two 21-inch torpedo tubes, and the destroyers approximately one hundred 24-inch tubes, against a total of ninety-eight 21-inch tubes mounted by the Allied ships; and their torpedoes were faster, of longer range, and with heavier charges than those of the Allies. Finally, the Japanese were flushed with victory and the exhilaration of attack, and possessed those other invaluable factors which the Allies lacked—homogeneity; tactical training and exercising; good communications; and air reconnaissance and spotting.

Shortly before 4.30 p.m. the Japanese delivered the first of a series of torpedo attacks. It was a coordinated attempt, with the Allied cruisers

⁴ As there are discrepancies in the times, both as between the Allies, and between them and the Japanese, *Perth's* times have been largely relied on in this account, as hers is the only first hand report of the whole battle. But where possible, checks have been made, and her times adjusted when other evidence justified.

⁵ Waller believed *Perth* scored a hit on one of the destroyers, and that the flotilla thereupon "retired behind smoke".

as targets. The four enemy cruisers, and the destroyers of the *4th Flotilla*, fired between them forty-three torpedoes. Probably because of the long range, no hits were scored, though the Allies, unaware that the attack had been made, took no evasive action. About this time (4.31 p.m.) *De Ruyter* was hit in the auxiliary engine room by an 8-inch shell which failed to explode. Immediately after the torpedo attack the Japanese *4th Flotilla* made smoke which temporarily obscured the opponents from each other, but the Japanese, with the aid of three spotting float-planes, maintained accurate gun fire and the Allied cruisers were continuously straddled, and Waller recorded: "Enemy long range fire was extremely accurate, mostly pitching very close short or over."

By now the Allied destroyers had taken station on the disengaged side of the cruiser line, steaming in line ahead in three groups, *Electra*, *Jupiter*, *Encounter*; then the Dutch; then the American. At 4.35 p.m. Doorman, again trying to get his light cruisers into action, altered course to west, and soon afterwards to N.W. by W. Apparently at this stage (though *Perth* was still out of range, and Waller noted: "I found a long period of being 'Aunt Sally' very trying without being able to return the fire") the shooting of the Allied heavy cruisers had some effect. Japanese reports state: "As at that time every ship was trying to avoid enemy shells our own shooting became less accurate"; and: "the enemy shells started to hit their targets with great accuracy. Many were the times when our ships received a direct hit." Observers in *Perth*, *Exeter* and *Houston* believed they saw hits on enemy ships at this stage of the fight.

The battle had all this time been moving westwards. Doorman was still unaware of the exact position of the Japanese convoy; but it was now sighted, by *Jintsu* in the Japanese northern van, away to the north-west; and in an attempt to head the Striking Force off and reach a decision before the convoy was involved, the Japanese delivered a second torpedo attack. The participating ships were the two heavy cruisers, *Jintsu*, and destroyers of the *2nd Flotilla*. Between 5 p.m. and 5.14 these ships fired a total of sixty-eight torpedoes. They were all aimed at the Allied cruisers, but only one found a mark, and that on the Dutch destroyer *Kortenaer*. This was possibly because just as the torpedo attack developed, *Exeter* was hit in a boiler room by an 8-inch shell from *Nachi*; six of the eight boilers were put out of action; and speed was reduced to 11 knots. The stricken ship hauled out of line to port, and the three cruisers following her altered together to conform, while *De Ruyter*, leading the line, continued alone on a N.W. by W. course until, seeing what had happened to the rest of his ships, Doorman himself swung southwards in a wide arc to the westward of the British destroyers, so that his force was now roughly in line abreast, with the destroyers in the van and the mean course south.

Perth, unaware that *Exeter* had been hit, interpreted this move as the result of the Japanese torpedo attack, and that "Allied cruisers had to turn away to let torpedoes comb the line". But at 5.14 *Exeter* stopped and reported being hit. She shortly proceeded again at 15 knots, and *Perth* closed and circled her, screening "with funnel smoke and all available

smoke floats". The enemy torpedoes now reached the Allied ships, and at 5.15 *Kortenaer* blew up close ahead of *Perth*. "She capsized and dived under in a few seconds, then broke in halves." Tracks of other torpedoes were seen, but no other ships were hit. It was a brief period of confusion in the Striking Force, and the battle area was covered with dense smoke made by *Perth* and destroyers covering *Exeter*. Meanwhile the Japanese heavy cruisers were still steering to the westward, but the ships of the 2nd and 4th Destroyer Flotillas had swung south-east to deliver a torpedo attack through the smoke. Doorman, trying to re-form his line, signalled "All ships follow me", and proceeded south-east, altering at 5.25 p.m. to north-east, a course which led *De Ruyter* and the cruisers following her between the Japanese and *Exeter*, and covered that ship's withdrawal. At the same time, Doorman ordered the British destroyers to attack. Conditions were unfavourable. Because of smoke, visibility was down to half-a-mile, and the three destroyers, too separated to make a divisional attack, did so independently. *Electra* drove through the smoke and cleared its northern fringe just as three enemy destroyers were entering on opposite course. In a rapid exchange of fire (in which *Electra* claimed hits on the enemy leader) the British destroyer received a shell in a boiler room which immobilised her. Two of the Japanese continued on in an attempt to attack *Exeter*, but were repulsed by *Jupiter* which, in company with *Encounter* (after that ship had a short, inconclusive clash with enemy destroyers) remained with *Exeter* as a covering force. The third Japanese destroyer returned to the immobilised *Electra*, and though that ship fought back, quickly silenced her guns one by one. "Abandon ship" was ordered when only one gun was left firing. Apparently all survivors were in the water, on floats and wreckage, when *Electra* "sighed, listed heavily to port and down by the bows". The last was then seen of her captain, Commander May,⁷ who came to the starboard side of the bridge and waved to the men in the water, "who cheered lustily". *Electra* then "settled more sleepily",⁸ and finally sank slowly out of sight about 6 p.m.⁹

At 5.40 p.m. Doorman ordered the damaged *Exeter* to retire to Surabaya, escorted by *Witte de With*. The two ships withdrew to the southward, for a while exchanging desultory fire with single enemy ships which momentarily appeared in the distance through the smoke. While in the smoke the Allied ships were at times under fire so accurate (owing to the Japanese having the benefit of aerial spotting) that Waller in *Perth* concluded it must have been radar controlled. But no ships, Allied or enemy, had radar. By 5.45 p.m. the Allied line had re-formed in line ahead in order *De Ruyter*, *Perth*, *Houston*, *Java*, followed by the four American destroyers, and emerged from the smoke on the opposite course to *Nachi* and *Haguro*, distant some 19,500 yards. Nearer, and steering an approximately parallel course to the Allies, were *Naka* and destroyers of the

⁷ Cdr C. W. May, RN. (HMS *Canada* 1918-19.) Comd HMS *Electra* 1941-42. B. 9 Jun 1899. Lost in sinking of *Electra* 27 Feb 1942.

⁸ From report of Mr T. J. Cain, RN, Gunner (T), *Electra's* senior surviving officer.

⁹ At about 3.15 a.m. on 28 Feb, 58 survivors of *Electra* were picked up by US submarine *S 38*.

4th Flotilla. Gun fire was exchanged, and Waller believed that *Perth* hit *Haguro*, causing "a very big explosion aft in the target with volumes of bright lava-like emissions and a pink smoke". The *4th Flotilla* now moved in for the third torpedo attack, and reversed course at 5.50, firing their torpedoes as they did so. A total of twenty-four were fired, unsuccessfully, Doorman altering course to south by west as an evading move. *Perth* fired on the enemy destroyers as they showed through gaps in the smoke; and "the destroyers also peppered me for some minutes". It is possible that she hit *Asagumo*, as that ship was hit in the engine room about 5.45 p.m., and immobilised for some 40 minutes as a result. After this brush *Houston* told *Perth* that she had very little 8-inch ammunition left, and Waller passed the information on to Doorman. The night dusk was growing, and visibility lessening. Just before 6 p.m. Doorman, countermanding an immediately previous order to the American destroyers to counter-attack, told them to make smoke. He then led the line round to east, and ordered the destroyers to "cover my retirement". This Commander T. H. Binford, commanding the American destroyer division, did by a torpedo attack, but without securing any hits.

About this time Takagi decided to break off the engagement and retire to the northwards. He did so because the lighthouse at Surabaya was visible, and he was apprehensive of submarines, and also of Dutch mines, inshore. This apprehension was heightened by explosions in the area, which the Japanese thought were mines, but which were actually their own torpedoes exploding at the end of their runs. By 6.30 p.m. contact between the opposing forces was lost. Doorman led the Striking Force (its strength reduced by *Exeter* and three destroyers) north-east, and subsequently on various courses between north-east and north-west, searching for the convoy which, at this time, was steering north again on Takagi's orders. At 22 knots, with the dusk paling into bright moonlight, the Striking Force steamed and searched, the cruisers in line ahead—*De Ruyter*, *Perth*, *Houston*, *Java*; *Jupiter* and *Encounter* astern of *Java*, and making up for the head of the column to form a screen; and the four American destroyers in line ahead on the Dutch cruiser's starboard quarter.

At 7 p.m. the Striking Force was steering W.N.W., gradually altering to north. Had Doorman but known it, he was then heading towards the Japanese convoy, which was a little more than 20 miles north-west of him. Between him and it, steering north-easterly trending to northerly courses was the Japanese *5th Cruiser Squadron*, distant about nine miles, with the *2nd Destroyer Flotilla* some two miles, and the *4th* some five miles, farther west. During the next half hour Doorman continued to alter to the north. Again he was suffering from lack of reconnaissance, while the Japanese were following his movements in aircraft reports, and closing him on a converging course, with *Jintsu* and the *2nd Flotilla* moving in. *Perth* sighted four ships—*Jintsu* and three destroyers—on the port beam at 7.27 p.m., distant "about 9,000 yards", and simultaneously a Japanese aircraft dropped a flare on the disengaged side of the Striking Force. *Jupiter*, which had got ahead of the column on *De Ruyter's* port

bow, and was steering N. by W. at 28 knots, also sighted the ships. *Perth* and *Houston* opened fire at 7.33, but three minutes later *Perth* saw a row of explosions in one enemy ship, and turned sharply to due east to avoid possible torpedoes. All ships followed suit, which possibly then prevented casualties, as *Jintsu* had in fact fired four torpedoes at 10,500 yards running range, with *De Ruyter* as target.

Within five minutes the Allied line had re-formed, and Doorman led round to south. He had, it seems, concluded that he could not get at the convoy to the northward, and his best plan would be to reach to the south and steam west along the coast, hoping to intercept there. There followed a period (reported Waller in *Perth*) when "the search went on without event, except that we appeared to get into very shallow water". There was no sign of the enemy, except for occasional star shells far to the north. The Striking Force reached shoal water at about 9 p.m. some 50 miles north-west of Surabaya. Here the four American destroyers (having no torpedoes left) broke off and proceeded to Surabaya to refuel. Doorman swung west, and steamed along the coast close inshore in line ahead: *Encounter*, *De Ruyter*, *Perth*, *Houston*, *Java*, and *Jupiter*. At 9.25, when she was about eight-and-a-half miles N.N.E. of Tuban, a heavy explosion abreast the forward bulkhead of No. 2 boiler room, wrecked and stopped *Jupiter*. It was thought that she had been torpedoed, but there is no record of the Japanese having fired torpedoes at this time. Mines had been laid that day by the Dutch in Tuban Bay, inside the 10-fathom line. It is probable that *Jupiter* struck one of these, as she sank in eight fathoms, approximately in the position in which she exploded, at 1.30 a.m. on the 28th. About one-third of her complement got ashore; one-third were captured by the Japanese;¹ and the remainder were lost.

Soon after the loss of *Jupiter*, Doorman turned northwards again, his every move being noted and passed on by the Japanese reconnaissance aircraft which watched him in the moonlight and dropped lines of bright calcium flares across his line of advance at each change of course. With this information, Waller observed, "the enemy's disposition of his forces must have been ridiculously easy". Doorman was back in the position of the second Japanese torpedo attack in the afternoon when *Kortenaer* was torpedoed, and about a quarter past ten the Allied force passed through a large number of her survivors in the water. "They did not seem to be English, but may have been either Japanese or Dutch," recorded Waller; and added: "I do not yet know if any Dutch ships were sunk", thus indicating how the fog of war was clouding the issue for the participants in the battle. *Houston* dropped a raft and flare, and *Encounter* stopped and rescued the survivors, whom she subsequently took to Surabaya.² The Striking Force was thus reduced to the four cruisers.

¹ Apparently those captured by the Japanese were taken from the sea by Takahashi's cruisers *Ashigara* and *Myoko* on the night of February 28. On the 28th both ships were about 60 miles N.W. of Bawean Island, covering the convoy. During the day they swept south, and then west through the areas of the previous day and night engagements, and on the evening of the 28th spent a period when "during one hour succoured enemy soldiers".

² *Encounter* picked up 113 of *Kortenaer's* complement, including her captain, Lt-Cdr A. Kroese.

Meanwhile Takagi, who had adjusted his courses "in order to keep pace with the movements of the Allied fleet, over which were two of our planes",³ lost contact when these aircraft (one of which was from *Jintsu* and the other from *Naka*) withdrew about 10 p.m. He altered course to the south soon after, and just before 11 p.m. *Nachi* and *Haguro* were sighted on the port bow by the Allied force. The Japanese increased speed, turned through west to a parallel course, and gun fire was exchanged, accurate but slow—for both sides were tiring. The Japanese now launched their fifth torpedo attack, eight from *Nachi* and four from *Haguro*, and secured hits on *De Ruyter* and *Java*, both of which ships blew up and sank, some 25 miles south-west of Bawean Island at about 11 p.m. on the 27th.⁴ *Perth* just escaped collision with *De Ruyter* by violent helm and engine manoeuvres. Doorman went down with his flagship. His verbal instructions had been that any ship disabled must be "left to the mercy of the enemy".⁵ Waller therefore took *Houston* under his orders, made a feint to the south-east, and then turned direct to Batavia at high speed. At ten minutes to one on the 28th he signalled to the Striking Force, repeated Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet and Commodore Commanding China Force: "Returning to Batavia. *De Ruyter* and *Java* disabled by heavy explosions in position 6°S 112°E." On receipt of this signal, the Dutch naval authorities in Surabaya ordered the hospital ship *Op Ten Noort* (6,076 tons) to sea, but she was captured by the Japanese.

Waller wrote of his decision to withdraw:

I now had under my orders one undamaged 6-inch cruiser, one 8-inch cruiser with very little ammunition and no guns aft. I had no destroyers. The force was subjected throughout the day and night operations to the most superbly organised air reconnaissance. I was opposed by six cruisers,⁶ one of them possibly sunk, and twelve destroyers. By means of their air reconnaissance they had already played cat and mouse with the main striking force and I saw no prospect of getting at the enemy (their movements had not reached me since dark, and even then the several reports at the same time all gave different courses). It was fairly certain that the enemy had at least one submarine operating directly with him, and he had ample destroyers to interpose between the convoy and my approach—well advertised as I knew it would be. I had therefore no hesitation in withdrawing what remained of the Striking Force and ordering them to the pre-arranged rendezvous after night action—Tanjong Priok.

³ Japanese report: "The Battle of the Java Sea", ATIS Document No. 15686, 28 Mar 1946.

⁴ Reports as to the range and bearings in this encounter vary. Waller's report says only that the Japanese ships were "a long way off". Morison, the U.S. Historian, says the torpedoes were fired "when the two columns were almost parallel, 8,000 yards apart". One Japanese report says 10,000 metres (10,936 yards) and adds that the torpedoes struck "after ten or fifteen minutes, the time estimated for them to reach their targets". Another more detailed Japanese report states: "00.53 torpedoes started being fired (*Nachi* 8, *Haguro* 4) shooting angle 80 degrees, distance 9.5 kilometres" (10,389 yards).

⁵ Waller's report.

⁶ There were in fact four, but had the two Allied cruisers remained they would probably have been opposed by six enemy cruisers. At the start of the Java Sea Battle, Takahashi, with *Ashigara* and *Myoko*, was some 300 miles away, to the east of the Kangean Islands. A Japanese account recorded at about 8 p.m. on the 27th that: "The *Ashigara* and the *Myoko* hurried to the scene of the battle." But apparently they did not reach the battle area until after midnight on the 27th, too late for the night action.

Admiral Helfrich later criticised this withdrawal.⁷ He wrote:

Strictly speaking the return of *Perth* and *Houston* was against my order 2055/26 —“You must continue attacks till enemy is destroyed.” This signal was intended to make it quite clear that I wanted the Combined Striking Force to continue action whatever the cost, and till the bitter end. *Perth* did receive this signal. Both cruisers were undamaged [*Houston's* after triple turret was out of action] and it was not right to say in anticipation “It is no use to continue action”, considering the damage inflicted upon the enemy cruisers, which in my opinion must have been severe. [Actually the enemy cruisers were all in battle trim.] However, it is possible that other facts had to be considered, such as shortage of fuel or ammunition. [*Houston*, as stated above, had very little ammunition remaining.] The decision of the captain of *Perth* is even more regrettable as, after all, both cruisers did meet their end. Probably on the night of 27th-28th February they would have sold their lives at greater cost to the enemy.

In his desire for “the Combined Striking Force to continue action whatever the cost, and till the bitter end”, Helfrich disregarded a major point in warfare: “When is it the right time to disengage?” On numerous occasions in the history of battles, he who found the right answer to that question has been rewarded with victory—a prize that has seldom been given in recognition of military suicide. Here were no conditions warranting a Thermopylae, with commensurate rewards for the sacrifice. Had none but military considerations governed the use of the Allied naval forces in the Java campaign, the time for their disengagement and withdrawal was reached long before Waller took his absolutely correct action in disengaging and withdrawing the remnant under his command. In that action he did his duty to the Allied cause, which would have been much better served by his saving the two ships and their trained crews for future use. In the event they were lost twenty-four hours later; but even so, most probably at greater cost to the enemy than would have been had Waller decided in favour of an unrealistic gesture on the night of 27th-28th February.

VII

The activities of Doorman's Striking Force did make one imposition on the Japanese. They caused the postponement for twenty-four hours of the invasion of Java, which had been intended for the night of the 27th-28th February; and both eastern and western convoys were temporarily withdrawn to the northward. During the 27th, Allied aircraft reported a convoy of 30 transports escorted by four cruisers and three destroyers 55 miles south of Banka Island, but steering away from Java, N by W for Banka Strait.⁸ In Tanjong Priok, Howden was instructed by Collins to take *Hobart* and the ships of the Western Striking Force on a northward

⁷ In the “Dutch Account”. This account was compiled in Australia by Lt-Cdr A. Kroese, RNN, captain of *Kortenaer*. It was forwarded to the Admiralty by Vice-Admiral Helfrich in September 1942 as the Dutch Official Report of the Battle of the Java Sea, and included comments by him, and by Rear-Admiral Palliser.

⁸ Intercepted Japanese reconnaissance reports indicated that enemy sightings of *Hobart* on the earlier sweep led them to classify her as a much larger ship, probably a battleship. At the time Collins, unaware of the happenings in the east and the postponement of the invasion, thought that it might have been the erroneous estimate of the size and strength of *Hobart* which caused the withdrawal of the western convoy.

sweep. It was a token gesture, for it was obvious that a force which consisted (apart from *Hobart*) of old and obsolete ships and which was numerically and materially so much inferior to that the Japanese could oppose to it, would stand little chance in an engagement. Howden's instructions, therefore, were that if he failed to meet the enemy by 4.30 a.m. on the 28th, he was to retire through Sunda Strait to Ceylon, calling at Padang on the way, there to embark refugees from Singapore and Sumatra. Collins' carefully worded signal,⁹ sent to Howden at 5.51 p.m., quite correctly ensured so far as possible that this weak force would not meet the Japanese and be uselessly sacrificed. *Hobart*, with *Dragon*, *Danae*, *Tenedos*, *Scout*, and the Dutch destroyer *Evertsen*, left Tanjong Priok at a quarter to one in the morning of the 28th. The ships had been unable to fuel, and Howden (who, unaware of the postponement, thought that the Japanese intended to land at Bantam in the night of the 27th-28th and seal off Sunda Strait) decided to proceed due north of the strait and thence sweep northwards with the object of intercepting. By 5 a.m. on the 28th, however, no enemy had been sighted, and Howden thereupon reversed course and entered Sunda Strait at 6.16 a.m. Passage of the strait (where was much floating wreckage, abandoned life-boats and rafts) was made at the maximum speed of 24 knots, and about 9 a.m. the force (minus *Evertsen*) cleared the strait and headed north-west for Padang. Howden recorded that "*Evertsen* apparently became separated from the force, and was not seen after about 4 a.m. on the 28th". She had, in fact, returned to Tanjong Priok.

There were other Australian ships in Sunda Strait. On the 27th, orders were given to clear all remaining British auxiliary craft from Tanjong Priok; and soon after dawn on the 28th, in the northern part of the strait, Howden's force sped past a convoy of such escorted by H.M.A. Ship *Yarra* and H.M.I.S. *Jumna*. With the convoy comprising the depot ship H.M.S. *Anking*; three tankers, *War Sirdar*, *British Judge*, and *Francol*;¹ and the minesweepers *Gemas* and *MMS.51*, they left Tanjong Priok about midnight on the 27th. Wind was light E.N.E., sea calm, with passing showers. At 4.20 a.m. on the 28th, *War Sirdar* went aground on Jong Reef, off Agentium Island, in the Thousand Island group just west of Tanjong Priok. *Wollongong* detached from the convoy and stood by, and at daylight made repeated but unsuccessful attempts to tow *War Sirdar* off. These were terminated by enemy air attack, and *Wollongong* set out to rejoin the convoy after advising *War Sirdar* to abandon ship and land on Agentium Island, and informing Collins.

Ships in the northern part of the strait were heavily and consistently bombed during the day. Farther south, *Wollongong's* six companions of the 21st Minesweeping Flotilla—*Maryborough*, *Toowoomba*, *Ballarat*,

⁹ The signal read: "Proceed towards south entrance Banka Strait at 20 knots. Unless enemy sighted reduce to 15 knots and alter course for Sunda Strait so as to reach Toppers Island [in the northern entrance to the Strait] by 6.30 a.m. on the 28th. Thence proceed with your force to Trincomalee, sending destroyers into Padang to fuel and bring off evacuees. If fuelling at Padang proves impracticable, fuel destroyers at sea."

¹ Of 5,542, 6,735 and 2,607 tons respectively.

Bendigo, *Goulburn* and *Burnie*—whose former day base at Merak was no longer tenable because of air attack, foregathered at 8 a.m. on the 28th off Third Point, on the Java coast. A number of the ships were short of fuel, and Cant, in *Maryborough*, decided to take the flotilla to Tjilatjap to replenish. At 11.15 *Bendigo* and *Burnie* were detached to rescue people seen signalling on the beach at Java Head. They were survivors of the Dutch ship *Boero*, torpedoed by a Japanese submarine two days before. *Bendigo* picked up 15, and *Burnie* 29 of her company. At midnight, when he was about due south of Batavia, Cant received orders from there to return to Sunda Strait with four ships. He sent *Bendigo* and *Burnie* with their passengers on to Tjilatjap; and *Maryborough*, *Toowoomba*, *Ballarat* and *Goulburn* reversed course to return to Sunda Strait. Twenty minutes earlier *Hobart*, then speeding with her force north-west along the west coast of Sumatra, some 120 miles south-east of Padang, intercepted an enemy report from *Perth*, just north of Sunda Strait.

It will be recalled that, of the three surviving cruisers and six destroyers of Doorman's Eastern Striking Force, *Exeter*, *Witte de With*, *Encounter*, and the four American destroyers, returned to Surabaya—reached by them at intervals during the night of 27th-28th February; and *Perth* and *Houston* to Tanjong Priok, where they arrived at 1.30 p.m. on the 28th. Some of the ships were damaged; most were short of ammunition (the American destroyers had no torpedoes left); and fuel was short also. It was decided to get as many of the survivors as possible south of Java, either to Tjilatjap, or farther afield to Australia or Ceylon. First to leave were the U.S. destroyers *Edwards*, *Alden*, *Ford*, and *Paul Jones*, which left Surabaya about 5 p.m. on the 28th. They successfully made the passage of Bali Strait in moonlight, and despite a brush with three Japanese destroyers (in which the Americans simulated torpedo fire with dummy flashes) made good their escape, and reached Australia four days later. At 7 p.m. on the 28th, *Exeter*, in company with *Encounter* and the American destroyer *Pope* (which had been prevented from joining Doorman's force because she was undergoing repair) left Surabaya. *Witte de With* was unable to accompany them because she needed repairs, and she fell into the hands of the Japanese at Surabaya later. *Exeter* was of too deep draft to make the Bali Strait passage, and was ordered to make for Colombo via Sunda Strait, proceeding north from Surabaya to pass eastward of Bawean Island, thence north-westward and westward to Sunda Strait. At about the same time (7 p.m. on the 28th) *Perth*, in company with *Houston*, sailed from Tanjong Priok for Tjilatjap. The Dutch destroyer *Evertsen* was to have accompanied them, but was not ready, and followed later.

Stocks of fuel in Tanjong Priok were low, and *Perth* sailed with approximately 50 per cent full stowage. She embarked some stores however, including about 24 merchant ship's wooden rafts—which were to prove most valuable. As he left Tanjong Priok, Captain Waller, in *Perth*, received air intelligence of an enemy convoy (ten transports escorted by

two cruisers and three destroyers) about 50 miles north-east of Batavia at 4 p.m., steering east. He remarked to his Navigator (Lieut-Commander Harper²) that it looked as though the Japanese would land east of Batavia that night, and agreed with Harper's reply that it was unlikely, with a convoy to look after, that the Japanese escort would trouble *Perth* or *Houston*. He had been warned to keep a good lookout for the Australian corvettes in Sunda Strait, and had no expectation of encountering enemy forces.³ The two ships hugged the Java coast, passing inside off-lying islands, steaming in line ahead with *Perth*, as Senior Officer, in the lead. At 10.45 p.m. they had Babi Island (some 50 miles west of Priok) abeam to starboard, distant one mile and a half. The sea was calm, the air still; there was a clear sky and full moon, and visibility was six or seven miles.

Waller's belief that he would encounter no enemy forces was ill-founded. Only a few miles ahead, in Bantam Bay (within the embrace of St Nicolas Point, north-west extremity of Java) and in the offing to the north, they lay in strength across his path. Soon after 10 p.m. General Imamura's *Western Invasion Convoy* entered Bantam Bay, escorted by light cruisers *Natori* and *Yura*; destroyers *Harukaze*, *Hatakaze*, *Asakaze*,⁴ *Fubuki*, *Hatsuyuki*, *Shirayuki*, *Shirakumo*, and *Murakumo*;⁵ and minelayer *Shirataka*.⁶ Away to seaward, *Mogami* and *Mikuma*, the 2nd Division of Rear-Admiral Kurita's 7th Cruiser Squadron, with the destroyer *Shikinami*,⁷ gave support. Cover was provided by the 1st Division of the 7th Cruiser Squadron—*Suzuya* and *Kumano*; the aircraft carrier *Ryujo*; and a number of destroyers, farther north.

Apparently the Allied cruisers were sighted by the destroyer *Fubuki* (patrolling to the north-east of the bay) and were shadowed by her some minutes before the enemy was seen by them. At 11.6 p.m., when about half-way across the mouth of the bay, *Perth's* lookouts sighted a ship about five miles ahead, close to St Nicolas Point. It was thought that she was one of the Australian corvettes of the Sunda Strait Patrol, but when challenged she at first replied unintelligibly with a greenish-coloured lamp, and then turned away making smoke. She was then seen to be a Japanese destroyer (probably *Harukaze*), and Waller sounded the alarm, made an enemy report, and ordered the forward turrets to open fire.

² Cdr J. A. Harper, DSC; RN. HMS *Calcutta* 1939-40; HMAS *Perth* 1941-42. B. 2 Oct 1913.

³ From report of Lt-Cdr J. A. Harper, RN, Navigator of *Perth*, compiled by him in September 1945 from notes made while a prisoner of war of the Japanese. This report forms the basis of this account of the action.

⁴ Japanese destroyers (1923-24), 1,270 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torp tubes, 34 kts; *Hatakaze* sunk 15 Jan 1945, *Asakaze* 23 Aug 1944.

⁵ *Shirakumo*, *Murakumo*, Japanese destroyers (1928), 1,700 tons, six 5-in guns, nine 24-in torp tubes, 34 kts; *Shirakumo* sunk 16 Mar 1944, off Hokkaido and *Murakumo* 12 Oct 1942, off New Georgia.

⁶ *Shirataka*, Japanese minelayer (1929), 1,345 tons, three 4.7-in guns, 16 kts; sunk 31 Aug 1944, in Luzon Strait.

⁷ *Shikinami*, Japanese destroyer (1929), 1,700 tons, six 5-in guns, nine 24-in torp tubes, 34 kts; sunk 12 Sep 1944, in South China Sea.

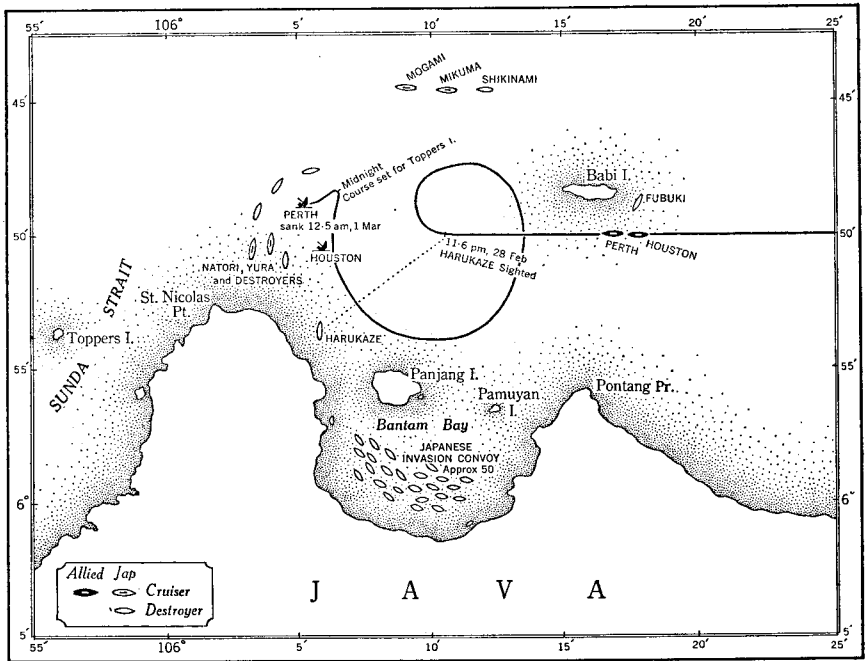
The encounter must have been as great a surprise to the Japanese as to the Allies. In the headquarters transport *Ryujo Maru*,⁸ General Imamura's aide lamented to himself:⁹

After coming such a long distance I at last heaved a sigh of disappointment to think that this landing operation was to be made without firing a single rifle or gun or without bloodshed.

But shortly after, sitting in his cabin trying to read a book, he heard:

the tremendous sound of the guns . . . about 16 kilometres NNE of our anchorage there were two battleships continuously firing their large guns. To our left I could clearly see what appeared to be a destroyer which was actively carrying on the fight.

In *Perth*, the original sighting was quickly followed by others, of destroyers and cruisers; and the ship's armament was split to engage different targets simultaneously. Waller himself handled the ship throughout the action, altering course violently and repeatedly (with *Houston* conforming and also engaging the enemy) so as to keep the guns bearing as necessary,



with the mean course describing a circle of approximately five miles diameter. There were so many targets (enemy destroyers attacked from all directions, and in the later stages of the action *Mogami* and *Mikuma* engaged from the north, adding their fire power to that of *Natori*) that

⁸ The real name of *Ryujo Maru* was *Akitsu Maru*. It was the practice of the Japanese to change the name of a ship for a particular operation as a security measure.

⁹ "Account of the Netherlands East Indies Operation"; ATIS, Enemy Publication No 32, 11 Aug 1943.

it was impossible to engage all simultaneously, so that some Japanese destroyers were able to close to very short range. *Perth* suffered her first hit at 11.26 p.m., in the forward funnel; another near the flag deck at 11.32; and a third near the waterline in the Ordinary Seamen's mess at 11.50. But damage was only superficial. She and *Houston* continued to fight with every effective gun (*Perth* fired her torpedoes at targets also) as they steamed at high speed, and zigzagged erratically over a sea whose still surface was torn by the giant splashes of exploding shells and torpedoes, and made vivid by the lightning glare of gun flash, the calm radiance of star shell, and the cold blue brilliance of searchlight.

Meanwhile the enemy was not scatheless. Harper recorded that "hits were definitely scored"—by *Perth*—"both by the main and smaller armaments, on some of the destroyers which closed in". A Japanese report¹ gives Japanese losses as "one minesweeper and one transport of convoy sunk and several vessels seriously damaged". One transport, *Sakura Maru* (7,170 tons), was certainly destroyed, and three more were sunk, though apparently later salvaged. *Sakura Maru* sank as the result of shell and torpedo hits, and Imamura's aide recorded that, in the *Ryujo Maru*, "the facial expression of the soldiers changed to anxiety". Their own ship was hit soon afterwards, and Imamura, his aide, and Adjutant Tanaka jumped into the sea, where the Commander-in-Chief floated around on a piece of wood for twenty minutes until a boat picked him up. There were some three to four hundred persons in the water, when suddenly *Ryujo Maru* listed, and the "tanks and automobiles and freight which had been loaded on the deck fell into the water beside us with a dreadful sound". "There was," recorded the aide, "a total of four ships damaged in the battle at the anchorage. The *Sakura Maru* is the only ship that really sank. The forms of the others, including the two Army H.Q. ships, can be seen above the surface due to the shallowness of the water."

About midnight *Perth's* Gunnery Officer, Lieut-Commander Hancox,² told his captain that very little 6-inch ammunition remained, and Waller, deciding to try to force a passage through Sunda Strait, ordered full speed and set course direct for Toppers Island. *Perth* had barely steadied on the course when, at five minutes past midnight, a torpedo struck on the starboard side. The report came: "Forward engine room out . . . speed reduced"; and Waller said "Very good". A few minutes later Hancox told Waller that ammunition was almost expended; the turrets were firing practice shells and the 4-inch guns were reduced to star shells. Again Waller said "Very good". A second torpedo hit under the bridge, also on the starboard side, shortly afterwards; and Waller said "Christ! That's torn it. . . . Abandon ship." Hancox asked: "Prepare to abandon ship?" "No! Abandon ship."³

¹ "Invasion of the Dutch East Indies", ATIS "AL.1096" 14 May 1948.

² Lt-Cdr P. S. F. Hancox, RAN. HMAS's *Stuart* 1939-41, *Perth* 1941-42. Of Hobart; b. Ipswich, Qld, 24 Mar 1913. Lost in sinking of *Perth*, 1 Mar 1942.

³ Ronald McKie, *Proud Echo* (1953), pp. 46-47. This book describes in detail the last action of *Perth*, through the experiences of ten survivors, officers and ratings in various positions in the ship. It is a most valuable addition to Australian naval history.

Most of those who got out of the ship left at about this time, before a third torpedo struck, well aft on the starboard side, about five minutes later. It was quickly followed by a fourth torpedo which hit on the port side. *Perth*, which had listed to starboard, came upright, heeled over to port, and sank about twenty-five minutes after midnight, approximately four miles N.N.E. of St Nicolas Point. *Houston* was still afloat and fighting, though badly on fire. She sank—torn by shell and torpedo explosions (for in addition to gun fire, the Japanese expended eighty-five torpedoes in the action)—about twenty minutes after *Perth*. Of her total complement of over 1,000, 368 survived as prisoners of war.

Little damage was done to *Perth* until the very end of the action, but she was repeatedly smashed by shell hits while abandoning ship after the second torpedo hit; and many of her people were killed or wounded in the water by exploding shells, and by the third and fourth torpedoes. Of her naval complement of 680—45 officers, 631 ratings, and 4 canteen staff⁴—23 officers and 329 ratings were killed in her last action; some 320 (of whom 105 ratings died while prisoners) fell into Japanese hands.⁵ As was Captain A. H. Rooks of *Houston*, Captain Waller was lost with his ship. He was last seen standing with his arms on the front of the bridge, looking down at the silent turrets.

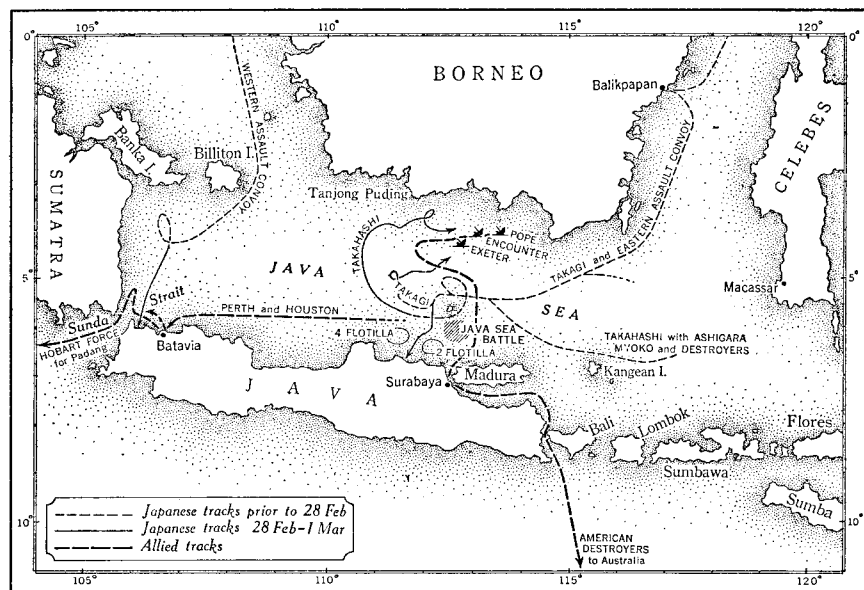
The Dutch destroyer *Evertsen* left Tanjong Priok about two hours after the cruisers, and around midnight reported seeing an engagement in progress off St Nicolas Point. She made Sunda Strait successfully, but was there intercepted by two enemy cruisers just before dawn on the 1st March, and was forced ashore, in a sinking condition, on Sebuku Island, off the south coast of Sumatra. In Bantam Bay the landings had gone ahead. Some time during the night Imamura's aide got ashore there, and found his General "sitting on a pile of bamboos about a hundred metres away. Dispiritedly I limped over to him and congratulated him on the successful landing. I looked around me. Everyone had a black face [with fuel oil] including the commander."

At the time *Perth* sank, *Exeter*, with *Encounter* and *Pope* screening ahead, was about 30 miles south-east of Bawean Island, steering north to pass it 25 miles to the eastward. Course was altered during the night in accordance with *Exeter's* routing orders, with two evading diversions when enemy ships were sighted in the distance. About 9.35 a.m. on 1st March, the force was steering W. by N., some 60 miles to the southward of Tanjong Puding on the south coast of Borneo, when the topmasts of two large cruisers were sighted over the southern horizon. They were *Nachi* and *Haguro* which, with the destroyers *Kawakaze* and *Yamakaze*, were

⁴ There were, in addition, one officer and five RAAF ranks on board.

⁵ Three ratings were killed by natives on Java, where, too, one died. Some tried to reach Australia in a boat, but had to put into Tjilatjap and were there captured. Many were taken from the sea by the Japanese Navy, and the treatment they at first received was not bad. Later treatment in captivity was—it killed one-fifth of them. Forty-two lost their lives as a result of Allied action while they were prisoners of war—in Japanese ships which were torpedoed, or in air raids. These were: *Rokyu Maru*, 33; *Nichimei Maru*, 2; *Elko Maru*, 2; air raid in Thailand, 2; air raid in Tokyo, 3. Of the remainder who died in captivity, 53 died on the Burma Railway; 4 in Japan; 2 in Java; 2 in Borneo; and 1 in Sumatra. One died in the Jap transport *Somdong Maru*.

covering the landings then in progress at Kragan, about 100 miles west of Surabaya. There the convoy for which Doorman had fruitlessly sought was lying under the close protection of the 2nd and 4th Flotillas, and successfully achieving its object despite Allied air attack. *Exeter* at once altered course to the northward, when two more cruisers were sighted ahead. These were *Ashigara* and *Myoko*, with the destroyers *Akebono* and *Inazuma* in company. The Allied force altered course to east, and *Exeter* managed to work up to a speed of 26 knots before the conclusion of a short running fight against heavy odds. *Exeter*, with two 8-inch enemy cruisers on the port quarter, and two more on the starboard beam, was



Situation, Java Area, 28th February-1st March 1942

in a situation which, in the words of her Commanding Officer, Captain Gordon,⁶ "was not encouraging". At 11.20 a.m. *Exeter* was stopped, with all power failed, by a hit in a boiler room. Orders were given to sink her and abandon ship, and about 11.50 a.m. on 1st March she sank—her end hastened by a torpedo from *Inazuma*—about 60 miles south-east of Tanjong Puding. *Encounter*, too, was fatally hit and abandoned. *Pope* survived the main surface engagement by escape under the cover of a providential rain squall, but was crippled by dive-bomber attack and finally sunk by cruiser gun fire about 1 p.m. on the 1st March.

All three of the Allied commanding officers (Captain Gordon, of *Exeter*; Lieut-Commander Morgan,⁷ of *Encounter*; and Commander W. C. Blinn, U.S.N., of *Pope*) survived their ships. They, together with 44 officers

⁶ Capt O. L. Gordon, CB, MVO; RN. (HMS *Emperor of India* 1916-19.) Comd HMS's *Maidstone* 1940, *Exeter* 1941-42. Of St Albans, Herts, Eng; b. 26 Jan 1896.

⁷ Capt E. V. St J. Morgan, DSC; RN. Comd HMS *Encounter* 1939-42. B. 11 Sep 1908.

and 607 ratings of *Exeter*; six officers and 143 ratings of *Encounter*; and the survivors of *Pope*; were subsequently taken from the water by Japanese destroyers, and became prisoners of war. On the Japanese side, some damage and casualties resulted from Allied gun fire; and it cost the enemy a total of 2,650 shells and 35 torpedoes to dispose of the Allied ships.⁸

⁸ From Japanese report accompanying "General Chart of naval battle off shore Surabaya, March 1st".

Ship	Torpedoes	Shells
<i>Haguro</i>	4	159
<i>Nachi</i>	4	129
<i>Myoko</i>	8	664
<i>Ashigara</i>	8	382
<i>Yamakaze</i>	4	479
<i>Kawakaze</i>	2	438
<i>Akebono</i>	—	120
<i>Inazuma</i>	5	279
	35	2,650

CHAPTER 17

PRELUDE TO VICTORY

WHILE *Exeter* and her destroyers fought their last action, Admiral Helfrich, in Bandung, told his British and American colleagues, Rear-Admirals Palliser and Glassford, that the Governor-General of the Netherlands East Indies had dissolved the ABDA naval command; and he himself formally renounced control of British and American forces, command of which devolved upon Commodore Collins and Rear-Admiral Glassford respectively. His news followed a discussion between the three admirals at which the British and American officers requested Helfrich to cancel his order to fight to the last. Helfrich demurred, whereupon Palliser said his instructions from the Admiralty were to withdraw H.M. ships from Java when resistance served no further useful purpose. In his opinion that time had come. "Therefore I feel it my duty to order H.M. ships to India at once, and this I propose to do." He adhered to this proposal though reminded by Helfrich that he was under his orders, and reproached with: "I lent to the British when Malaya was threatened, all of my fighting fleet—my cruisers, my destroyers, my submarines, my air—all of it was placed at your disposal for operation as you saw fit." Asked his intentions by Helfrich, the American admiral said he would obey his—Helfrich's—instructions; but added that he concurred without reservation in the advice given to Helfrich by Palliser. Helfrich then said: "Very well then, Admiral Palliser, you may give any orders you wish to His Majesty's ships. Admiral Glassford, you will *order* your ships to Australia."¹ Helfrich's personal inclination to fight to the last ship in defence of the Dutch possessions is understandable, as is Palliser's insistence that the retention of Allied ships within the Malay Barrier was at this stage neither useful nor practical. Helfrich's momentary hard feelings were quickly overcome by his grasp of the realities, and he and Palliser parted without rancour. The Dutch admiral, with his staff, left Java by air next day for Colombo, where he arrived on 3rd March and set up headquarters.

At 8.20 a.m. on 1st March, Palliser telephoned from Bandung to Collins at Batavia, confirming a previously teleprinted instruction that he was to withdraw from Batavia, and agreeing that a signal should be sent diverting all British warships to Tjilatjap. At 8.30 a.m. the naval base staff, with transportable equipment and documents, left Batavia in a land convoy of cars and trucks for Tjilatjap; a number of others, including survivors of *Jupiter*, followed later by train.

On this morning, ships still at Tjilatjap included the British destroyer *Stronghold* and the Americans *Pillsbury* and *Parrott*; the American gunboats *Tulsa*, *Asheville*² and *Isabel*;³ and a number of merchant ships

¹ This account of the discussion is from a recollection of Admiral Glassford's, given in detail by S. E. Morison in *History of US Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol III, pp. 376-77.

² *Tulsa*, *Asheville*, US gunboats (1922 and 1918), 1,270 tons, three 4-in guns, 12 kts. *Asheville* sunk 3 Mar 1942, south of Java.

³ *Isabel*, US gunboat (1917), 710 tons, two 3-in guns, 26 kts.

among which were the Dutch *Generaal Verspijck* (1,213 tons) and *Zaandam* (10,909 tons). Approaching the port from the westward were *Burnie* and *Bendigo*; and some miles astern of them the *Yarra* convoy, now consisting of *Anking*, *Francol*, and *MMS.51*, escorted by *Yarra* and *Jumna*. One ship of the convoy, the tanker *British Judge*, was torpedoed the previous evening south of Sunda Strait. She remained afloat and was now some distance astern of the convoy, making her way at slow speed towards Tjilatjap escorted by *Wollongong*. Not far from these two ships, anchored off Tiljil Island some 50 miles east of Java Head, were the other four ships of the 21st Minesweeping Flotilla, *Maryborough*, *Toowoomba*, *Ballarat* and *Goulburn*. They were returning to Sunda Strait as ordered by wireless from Batavia⁴ when, in the morning of 1st March, they intercepted *Evertsen's* signal saying she had been engaged by Japanese cruisers and was beaching on Sebu Island. Learning thus that the enemy was now in Sunda Strait in force, Commander Cant decided to take his four ships to Tjilatjap, and set course for that port during the morning. Away some 700 miles north-west of Tjilatjap, *Hobart* and her force were at Padang in Sumatra, where the cruisers, having sent the destroyers on ahead, arrived on the 1st. Here *Hobart* embarked 512 refugees—army, navy, air force, and civilians including women and children—from *Tenedos*, and sailed with her for Colombo that evening, leaving the other ships of the force to follow.

Some 200 miles south of Java, in the vicinity of Christmas Island, was H.M.A.S. *Warrego*; and about 200 miles south of her again were three U.S. ships—the destroyers *Whipple* and *Edsall* transferring to the oiler *Pecos* the survivors from *Langley*. Westward of them, some 400 miles south-west of Christmas Island, U.S.S. *Phoenix*, having handed over convoy "MS.5" to H.M.S. *Enterprise* the previous day, was steering to the eastward towards 15 degrees south 113 degrees east (450 miles north-west of Port Hedland on the West Australian coast) which position had been nominated as a rendezvous point for ships escaping from Tjilatjap. To the westward from *Phoenix* some 400 miles was the U.S. transport *Mount Vernon*, speeding towards Australia. She carried 4,668 troops, first of the "Stepsister" ships bringing the A.I.F. from the Middle East. Spread out over the ocean in independent sailings were a number of equipment ships of the "Stepsister" movement, each carrying motor vehicles and a few hundred troops; and away to the north-west the first large convoy, convoy "SU.1" of twelve ships⁵ carrying 10,090 troops, was leaving Colombo for Australia, escorted by H.M. Ships *Royal Sovereign*, *Cornwall*, *Express* and *Hollyhock*,⁶ and H.M.A. Ships *Manoora*, *Nizam*, and *Vampire*. In addition to all these were the carrying ships of trade, vital

⁴ The signal ordering their return to Sunda Strait was later cancelled by another from Batavia, which was not received by the flotilla.

⁵ *Eastern Prince* (10,926 tons); *City of Paris* (10,902); *City of London* (8,956); *Esperance Bay* (14,204); *Kosciusko* (6,852); *Egra* (5,108); *Salween* (7,063); *Silverwillow* (6,373); *Penrith Castle* (6,369); *Mathura* (8,890); *Madras City* (5,092); *Empire Glade* (7,006). Ten months earlier, in April 1941, two of these ships, *City of London* and *Salween*, were embarking men of the AIF from beaches at the withdrawal from Greece.

⁶ HMS *Hollyhock*, corvette (1940), 1,010 tons, one 4-in gun, 17 kts; sunk 9 Apr 1942, E of Ceylon.

to the war economy of the Allies, scattered over the Indian Ocean on the routes between Australia and South Africa, Ceylon, India, the Persian Gulf, and Suez. And threatening the fugitives escaping from the ABDA Area, and such other ships as they might find as they prowled in the offing south of Java as far west as Cocos Island, were the ships of Nagumo's and Kondo's forces. Two of the American ships, *Edsall* and *Pecos*, fell victims to them that afternoon. The battleships *Hiyei* and *Kirishima* of Nagumo's force sank *Edsall*, and aircraft from *Soryu* despatched *Pecos*. Others were to be caught in the trap within the next few hours.

II

Bendigo and *Burnie* berthed at Tjilatjap in the afternoon of 1st March. The presence of the Japanese forces south of the port was now known to the Allied naval authorities, and *Bendigo* broadcast a message authorised by Collins telling all British ships to avoid Tjilatjap if fuel permitted, and make for Fremantle or Colombo. The American ships (ordered by Glassford to make for Australia) left the port in the morning, but *Stronghold* was still there, waiting for *Zaandam*, which was embarking refugees. These two ships sailed in company at 6 p.m. for Fremantle. About 8.30 p.m. Collins arrived at Tjilatjap and boarded *Burnie*. *Bendigo* meanwhile embarked 89 passengers,⁷ including survivors from *Jupiter* and, with her normal complement of 77 more than doubled, sailed at 11.30 p.m. for Fremantle.

Early on 2nd March the main road party from Batavia reached Tjilatjap. Also in the early hours—a few minutes after midnight—Cant's four corvettes met *Jumna*, *Yarra* and their convoy making for the port. Later in the day the rail parties, including 45 survivors from *Electra* and some more from *Jupiter*, arrived in two trains. It was by now clear that *Burnie* could not accommodate the increasing numbers to be withdrawn, and the Dutch N.O.I.C. made available *Generaal Verspijck*, on the understanding that the British naval passengers would steam and work the ship, the majority of whose crew had deserted. A party of 41 naval officers and 108 ratings under Commander Farquharson R.N. were thereupon embarked in her, together with the Consul-General for Batavia and 27 British civilians. Others, including Collins' Chief Staff Officer, Captain Bell,⁸ RN (formerly Captain of the Fleet to Admiral Phillips) with 19 officers and 67 ratings, were accommodated in the Dutch *Khoen Hoea* (1,238 tons).

About 11 a.m. on the 2nd, *Jumna* and *Yarra*, with their convoy, arrived off the port, followed by Cant's four corvettes. A signal from Collins told them not to enter, and in accordance with the orders *Jumna* made for Colombo while *Yarra* and the convoy turned south for Fremantle. Two of the corvettes were short of fuel, and the four ships (led by *Goulburn*,

⁷ Ten officers from Collins's staff; one RAF officer, one civilian; five officers and 72 men from *Jupiter*.

⁸ Capt L. H. Bell, CBE; RN. (HMS *Inflexible* 1917-19.) Capt of Fleet to C-in-C Eastern Fleet 1941-44. B. 7 Oct 1892.

the only one which had previously entered the port) were in the searched channel when the signal was received, and on being warned by Paul,⁹ *Goulburn's* commanding officer, of the danger from mines if an attempt were made to reverse course in such narrow waters, Cant decided to carry on and enter harbour, and he anchored at 11.43 a.m. In the meantime, *British Judge*, some small distance to the westward and making for the port at 9 knots escorted by *Wollongong*, intercepted Collins' signal to *Jumna*: "If fuel permits do not enter Tjilatjap. Proceed *Jumna* to Colombo and remainder to Fremantle. Oil fuel available Exmouth Gulf." She passed the signal to *Wollongong*, who instructed her to make for Colombo independently, while the corvette set course for Australia.

Cant's four ships helped to ease the accommodation problem, and each made space available for 30 passengers, though this was not fully utilised. *Toowoomba* and *Goulburn* sailed at 6 p.m. and hugged the coast to the east before turning south for Australia. *Burnie*, with Collins on board and wearing his Broad Pendant, sailed at 8 p.m., and also steered east before making to the south. *Maryborough*, which left at the same time escorting *Generaal Verspijck*, steered W.S.W. for some hours before altering to south at noon on the 3rd. Last of the British ships to go was *Ballarat*, deputed to embark equipment and crew from the minesweeper H.M.S. *Gemas*, and to sink that ship before leaving. This task was completed seven miles off the coast just before 2 a.m. on 3rd March, and *Ballarat* then steered west close inshore for two hours before setting course for Exmouth Gulf.

By this time *Stronghold*, the first of the British ships to leave Tjilatjap, had fallen a victim to the prowling Japanese south of the port. When she sailed on the evening of the 1st she gave anti-submarine protection to *Zaandam* until midnight, when that ship proceeded ahead independently for Fremantle. *Stronghold* was reduced by fuel shortage to an economical speed of 12 to 15 knots. About nine o'clock next morning *Stronghold* was sighted and shadowed for some time by an enemy aircraft, and just before 6 p.m., when some 300 miles south of Java, was intercepted by the Japanese cruiser *Maya*, and the destroyers *Arashi* and *Nowaki*, of Admiral Kondo's force. (The two other cruisers of the force, *Atago* and *Takao*, were also present, but stood off at some distance, and did not take part in the engagement.) Action was joined immediately, and lasted for about an hour, when *Stronghold*, on fire and badly battered by gun fire, and with her captain (Lieut-Commander Pretor-Pinney¹) fatally wounded and many killed and wounded on her decks, lay stopped and immobilised, with *Maya* 3,000 yards distant on her starboard bow and the enemy destroyers 2,000 yards off on the port beam. "Abandon ship" was ordered, and a few minutes afterwards, about 7 p.m., *Stronghold* blew up and sank. The weather was clear, with a heavy swell. Soon after dawn

⁹ Cdr B. Paul, DSC, RD; RANR(S). HMAS *Canberra* 1939-40; comd HMAS's *Goulburn* 1941-43, *Castlemaine* 1944; HMAS *Manoora* 1944-45. Of Strathfield, NSW; b. London 6 Sep 1904.

¹ Lt-Cdr G. R. Pretor-Pinney, RN. (HMS's *Iron Duke* 1914-17, *Caradoc* 1917-19.) Comd HMS's *Rion* 1940-41, *Stronghold* 1941-42. B. 1 Sep 1897. Died of wounds 2 Mar 1942.

next day—3rd March—a small Dutch K.P.M. steamer, captured by the Japanese the previous day, picked up fifty survivors of *Stronghold* from two Carley floats, “when a cruiser came along and prevented her rescuing any more”. The rescued were transferred to the cruiser, *Maya*, where “the treatment afforded us was exceptionally good by Japanese standards as we subsequently found out. We were given medical treatment for wounds and allowed on deck to have a smoke several times daily.”²

Before sinking *Stronghold*, Kondo’s force accounted for U.S.S. *Pillsbury*, which left Tjilatjap in the morning of the 1st March and was intercepted and sunk the same day. Another American ship, the gunboat *Asheville*, was 140 miles or so N.N.W. of the Japanese force, in position 10 degrees 30 minutes South, 110 degrees 10 minutes East (where she was sighted at 5.20 p.m. on 2nd March by H.M.A.S. *Bendigo*) at the time *Stronghold* was intercepted. She, too, ran into the force and was sunk in the early hours of the 3rd March.

In the forenoon of 3rd March, when *Stronghold*’s survivors were being taken on board *Maya*, only one of the Australian ships escaping from Java was to the southward of Kondo’s force. *Bendigo*, which had been the first of the corvettes to leave Tjilatjap, slipped safely past the Japanese during the night of the 2nd-3rd, and was now approximately 80 miles to the south-east. *Wollongong* was some 150 miles to the W.N.W., *Burnie* 150 miles or so to the N.N.W., with *Ballarat* about 100 miles astern of her; while *Maryborough* was some 300 miles to the north-west of the Japanese, and *Goulburn* and *Toowoomba* about 120 miles N. by W. from them.

One hundred and eighty miles or so N.W. by N. from the enemy force on this afternoon of the 3rd were *Yarra* and her convoy, steering S.S.E. at a mean speed of $8\frac{1}{2}$ knots. Late on the 2nd they were, for some time, shadowed by an enemy aircraft. Now, on the 3rd, they sighted two sail, ship’s life-boats, from which *Yarra* took survivors—Dutch and Javanese—of the Dutch merchant ship *Parigi* (1,172 tons), which was sunk by the Japanese on the 1st. The remainder of 3rd March, and the night that followed, were without incident except for a reported submarine contact during the night, when *Yarra* dropped two depth charges. But during that period Kondo’s force cruised leisurely to the westward, and at 6.30 a.m. on the 4th, “in a glorious sunrise”, *Yarra*’s clanging alarm rattles struck a chill to the hearts of men who were hoping to be in Australia within four days. They told of the sighting, to the N.N.E., of Kondo’s three heavy cruisers and two destroyers.

The bare facts of a brief Japanese report tell:

In the early morning of the 4th March 1942 the following ships of No. 2 Fleet were cruising in the area Latitude South $12^{\circ}15'$ Longitude East $110^{\circ}10'3''$ —“A” class cruisers *Atago*, *Takao*, and *Maya*; No. 4 Destroyer Squadron *Arashi*, *Nowaki*.

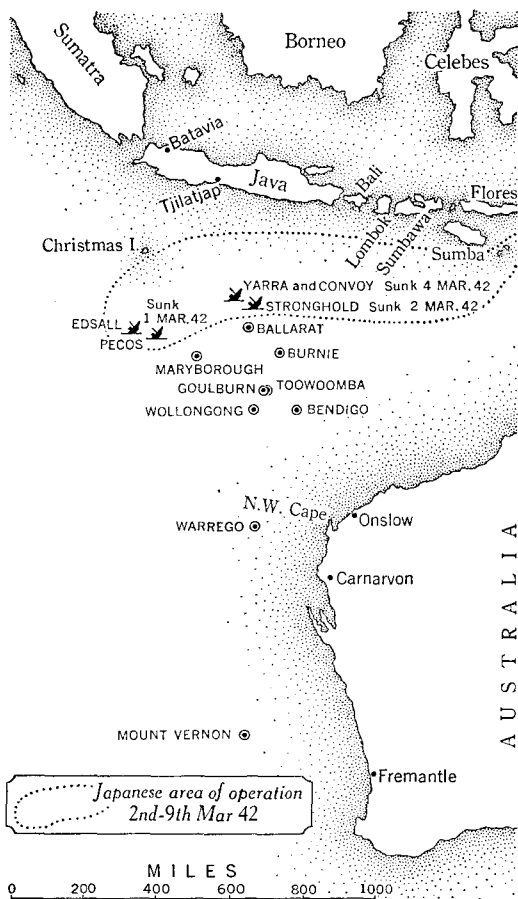
² From an account by Able Seaman John F. Murphy, a New Zealand naval rating survivor from *Stronghold*.

³ Recorded positions of the encounter vary. The Japanese is as above, $12^{\circ}15'S$, $110^{\circ}10'E$; *Anking* is recorded as sinking in $11^{\circ}20'S$, $109^{\circ}51'E$; *MMS.31* in $11^{\circ}30'S$, $109^{\circ}3'E$. The Dutch ship *Tjltmanoeck* (5,628 tons) picked up survivors of *MMS.31* in $11^{\circ}39'S$, $109^{\circ}01'E$, on 7th March.

They sighted two enemy transport vessels under escort of two light naval vessels which were attacked by gun fire and sunk. None of the Japanese ships suffered any damage.

As soon as the enemy was sighted, Lieut-Commander Rankin, *Yarra's* Commanding Officer, made an enemy report, ordered the ships of the convoy to scatter, took station between them and the Japanese, and made smoke to screen them while himself engaging. From the start it was a hopeless effort. One by one the four ships were smashed and sunk by gun fire from an enemy whose advantages in range, speed, and overwhelming superiority in fire power, resolved the encounter into a mere matter of target practice for him, aided by spotting by two aircraft catapulted from the cruisers.

Anking was the first to go. Hit many times by gun fire from the cruisers, she sank soon after 6.30 a.m. *Yarra* was then on fire and with a heavy list to port, but was still shooting. *MMS.51* was on fire. *Fran-col* was being engaged by one of the destroyers. *MMS.51* (whose crew had abandoned ship after taking scuttling action) was the next put under, sunk by close-range pom-pom fire from one of the cruisers. At about 7.30 a.m. *Fran-col* sank. Last to go was *Yarra*, some time after 8 a.m. Rankin ordered "Abandon Ship" shortly before he was killed when an 8-inch salvo hit the bridge. Leading Seaman R. Taylor, captain of the last remaining gun, disregarded the "Abandon Ship" order, and continued in action until he was killed and the gun silenced. The sinking of their ship—after heavy close-range shelling by the destroyers and bombing by the cruisers' aircraft—was watched by 34 survivors of *Yarra*, who were on two rafts. All except one were ratings. The exception



was the Dutch captain of *Parigi*. The final stage of the drama was watched also, by survivors of *Stronghold*, from the cruiser *Maya*. When the convoy was first sighted they were sent below decks under guard, but later

We were taken on deck and shown, as they tried to impress us, the might of Japan's navy. The *Yarra* was the only ship left afloat, and we could see flames and a great deal of smoke. The two destroyers were circling *Yarra* which appeared stationary, and were pouring fire into her. She was still firing back as we could see odd gun flashes. The three cruisers then formed line ahead and steamed away from the scene. The last we saw of *Yarra* was a high column of smoke, but we were vividly impressed by her fight. . . .⁴

Survivors from all ships of the convoy attested to the gallant way in which *Yarra* fought.

When *Yarra* sank, the five Japanese ships (of which a destroyer picked up one boat load of survivors from *Francol*, twelve Chinese in charge of the ship's Chief Officer, Mr Kermode⁵) made off to the N.N.E. Scattered widely over the sea they left, were a number of boats and rafts. Fourteen survivors from the crew of sixteen of *MMS.51* were on two Carley floats. Towards evening of the 4th they sighted a steamer which stopped for an hour and a half, too far distant to be attracted by their signals. She was the Dutch *Tawali* (8,178 tons), which rescued 57 officers and men in a life-boat from *Anking*, and then steamed away over the sea's rim.⁶ The survivors of *MMS.51* sighted more ships at a distance next morning, and picked up a Chinese (from *Anking*) who was alone on a raft. All that day and the next—5th and 6th March—they drifted around, sun blistered by day and chilled by night. About 2 p.m. on the 7th they were picked up by the Dutch steamer *Tjimanoeck*. Among others still drifting around were the survivors of *Yarra*, now heavily reduced by death from wounds, exposure, and thirst, from the original thirty-four. On 9th March, they were picked up—thirteen of the sloop's ratings, for the Dutch captain of *Parigi* was among those who died—by the Dutch submarine *K 11*. There were others, including another boat load from *Francol*, who were never heard of again.

The survivors were deeply impressed with the conduct of their Dutch rescuers. "Our wounded were tended, we were given clothes and every attention possible, and the kindness and hospitality of the Dutch captain, the officers and crew [of *Tjimanoeck*] were beyond praise," reported those from *MMS.51*. It was the same with the ship's company of *K 11*, of whom a *Yarra* survivor wrote: "We could not adequately thank the Dutchmen. No men in the world could have been kinder to us." *Tjimanoeck* landed her rescued in Fremantle on 13th March. *Tawali* and *K 11* took theirs to Colombo. It was not until the 22nd, when a signal from Admiral Layton told of *K 11*'s arrival there, that Australia knew there were any sur-

⁴ From a report by Murphy, of *Stronghold*.

⁵ W. R. Kermode. Served in *War Pathan* 1939, *Appleleaf* 1939-40, *Francol* 1940-42. B. Douglas, *Isle of Man*, 16 Mar 1901.

⁶ One officer and 25 ratings of the RAN were lost in *Anking*.

vivors from *Yarra*.⁷ Of that ship's total complement of 151, 138, including the captain and all officers, went down with the ship or died subsequently on the rafts.

The events of those first days of March 1942 illustrate the vagaries which decided the fates of ships and their people, and the potentialities for concealment which lie in wide sea expanses. There is little doubt that the survival of Cant's four corvettes was due to their entering Tjilatjap on the morning of the 2nd. Had they not done so they would most likely have joined up with *Yarra* and her convoy, and been destroyed with it on the morning of the 4th. Even as it was they, in common with other ships such as the Dutch *Tawali*, were not far over the sea's rim while Kondo's force, with aircraft aloft in extreme visibility was destroying *Yarra* and her charges. Yet they and many others, including *Warrego*, escaped detection not only by Kondo's force, but by Nagumo's carriers and the other groups of Japanese ships, and reached safety. Indeed, the surprising feature is that the large and scattered Japanese forces south of Java during the 1st to the 4th March, aided as they were by aerial reconnaissance, did so little damage to ships escaping from the ABDA Area, or otherwise in the vicinity. In all they accounted for twenty ships in that period—*Stronghold*, *Pillsbury*, *Edsall*, *Asheville*, *Pecos*, *Yarra*, and eleven others (including *Yarra's* convoy and *Prominent*) sunk; and three merchant ships captured. On 5th March Nagumo's force bombarded Tjilatjap,⁸ where seventeen ships were sunk in the harbour, though Dutch sources state that sixteen of these were scuttled by the defenders, and only one ship, *Enggano*, was sunk in the bombardment. Kondo's force returned to Staring Bay, Celebes, on the 7th March, where *Stronghold's* survivors in *Maya* saw: "battleships, carriers, submarines, cruisers etc.", and, on shore, "tall, bush-covered hills". Nagumo arrived there a few days later, after shelling Christmas Island on 7th March.

That day the first of the last flight from Tjilatjap reached Fremantle. U.S. Ships *Parrott* and *Isabel* arrived there, as did also *Warrego*. The first of the Australian corvettes, *Burnie* and *Bendigo*, reached there next day, and U.S.S. *Tulsa*. That was 8th March, when *Maryborough*, with *Generaal Verspijck* in company, was still some miles from the Australian port. Cant recorded of that morning:

Sunday 8th March. A.M. Held prayers on the quarterdeck, which was attended by every available man regardless of denomination, which may show that religion has helped us a lot in the last two or three months. 1900 parted company with *Generaal Verspijck*.

Ballarat, *Goulburn*, and *Wollongong* reached Fremantle on 9th March, and on that day *Mount Vernon* delivered her returning A.I.F. troops safely in Adelaide. On the 10th *Toowoomba*, *Maryborough* and *Generaal*

⁷ They were: OD J. R. Archibald, Stoker PO V. Braizier, Ldg Signalman G. G. Bromilow, OD K. P. Buckley, Ldg Stoker F. J. Cairncross, OD W. G. Clark, Ldg Supply Asst E. A. Latham, OD R. L. Manthey, AB A. G. Orton, ERAIII E. L. Ramsden, Ldg Stoker D. L. Stevenson, Ldg Cook H. G. Wagland, and OD W. D. Witheriff.

⁸ Japanese report: "Invasion of the Dutch East Indies", ATIS, Document "AL.1096".

Verspijck entered Fremantle harbour, so that all the ships of the 21st Minesweeping Flotilla were reunited in Australia. Theirs had been a series of rearguard operations. As Cant recorded, they

were among the last to leave Singapore, Palembang, Sunda Strait, Tjilatjap and Oosthaven. They had been used as minesweepers in areas subject to frequent air attacks, and patrols in the Sunda Straits. At Merak we received every help and kindness from the N.E.I. ships *Soemba*, *Sirius*, and *Fazandt*. The conduct of the ships' companies under trying conditions was very praiseworthy, and they were keen and reliable in everything they were called upon to do.

So ended the Allied attempt to stem the Japanese flood which swept down from the north to engulf the vast South-West Pacific Area to the shores of the Malay Barrier and the western shores of Burma and its off-lying islands. It was from the outset a losing fight which failed even to delay the enemy for more than a few hours. It was so because the Allies, lacking the means so to do, could not establish and hold control of the sea in the area. Within that simple fact lay triumph for the Japanese but, at the same time, a warning that such triumph might soon fade, wilted by that which had brought it to such swift blossoming. For the Japanese had, in their expanded but limited empire, consolidated under one command their home islands and the separate isolated fortresses of the Allies, without relieving the sea-girt isolation in which they were as a whole geographically situated. As was remarked in the opening chapter of this volume when discussing the value of Singapore as a naval base, Britain's failure, in the ABDA Area, to secure for herself the sea communications of the invading and defending forces respectively, made "the fall of Singapore, sooner or later, inevitable".⁹ No less inevitable, in due time, was the fall of the new Japanese empire unless its defenders could secure the sea communications of an invader as well as their own; as inevitable "as the fall of every isolated fortress on land or at sea has been inevitable throughout the whole history of war".

This was not lost upon the Japanese, who staked their future on their ability to establish such formidable defences in depth in and through the island screen which curtained the eastern and western boundaries of their Western Pacific empire (and which they hoped to extend southwards so as to isolate Australia and New Zealand from their powerful American ally) that the magnitude of the task would weaken the will and determination of an invader. In assessing the value or otherwise of the apparently fruitless Allied sacrifices in these opening months of the war against Japan—sacrifices in ships, in aircraft, in military equipment; in lives and suffering, and the long months in prison camps—their effect on the will and determination of the Allies must be considered. Militarily much was lost. But the Allies, in defeat, kept faith with each other. The absence of defection, and the resultant bond which grew and strengthened in adversity, were surely no small contribution to ultimate victory.

⁹ Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, *Statesmen and Seapower*, 1946.

III

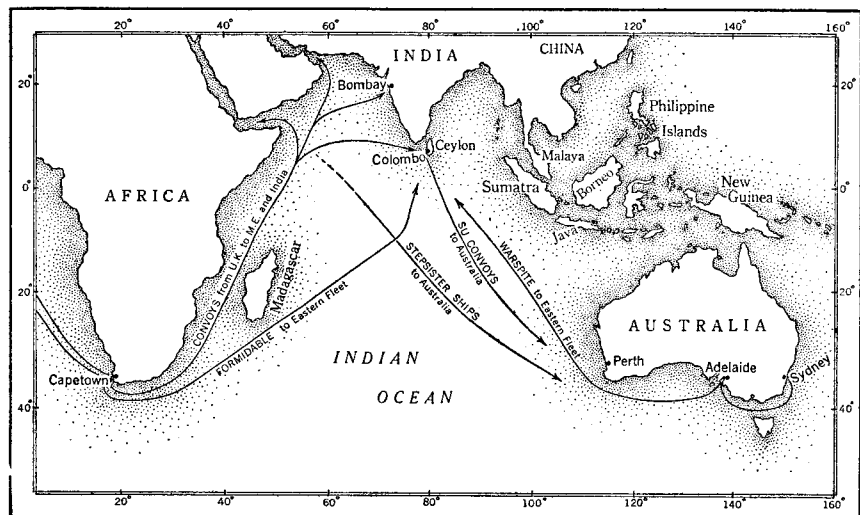
While the curtain was descending on the final scene in the ABDA Area, the Australian and New Zealand Governments sombrely considered the existing situation and its immediate implications, and searched for means of checking further Japanese advances which now offered a more direct threat to their respective countries. Concurrently with his thrusts in the ABDA Area, the enemy probed increasingly at New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, following up air attacks with small landings which deepened his penetration southwards from Rabaul. Tulagi, headquarters of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, with its small force of about fifty R.A.A.F. and A.I.F. at the flying-boat base on Tanambogo Island, had its first air raid on 22nd January on the eve of the Japanese occupation of Rabaul, and thereafter was attacked every two or three days. Buka Passage was first bombed on 25th January. On the 28th the enemy occupied Anir and Nissan Islands north of the Solomons, and on the 31st bombed Gizo. On the 8th February the Burns Philp steamer *Morinda* (2,025 tons), went to Tulagi and embarked civilians withdrawing from the islands. She was bombed as she entered the harbour, but completed her mission successfully and unharmed. A few days later the Resident Commissioner, His Honour W. S. Marchant,¹ removed the British headquarters to Auki, on Malaita Island some 45 miles to the north-east.

In New Guinea, Port Moresby had its first air raid on 3rd February, and was thenceforth raided at intervals of a few days with increasing intensity. Moresby's fifth raid was on 3rd March, on which day Wyndham and Broome, on Australia's north-west coast, also suffered air raids. In the raid on Wyndham, by eight aircraft, the motor vessel *Koolama* was sunk. On 8th March the Japanese made landings on the north coast of New Guinea, at Salamaua and Lae. That day, too, a Japanese force of six cruisers and two destroyers anchored in Carola Harbour, on Buka Island in the Solomons, and naval parties landed, but did not then remain. That was at the eastern extreme of the Japanese advance. At the western, the enemy on the same 8th March entered Rangoon. This decided the fate of Lower Burma, and heralded that of Upper Burma, now under imminent threat. On the next day the Japanese forces for the occupation of northern Sumatra, Sabang, and the Nicobar Islands farther north, left Singapore.

At the end of February the Chiefs of Staff of Australia and New Zealand, in collaboration with the Commanding General of United States forces in Australia, General Brett (who had resumed that command on the 24th February on the dissolution of the ABDA Command) submitted a report on the situation, and their views as to what should be the future Allied policy and strategy in the Pacific. Therein was anticipated that Allied resistance in the Netherlands East Indies would probably cease in about a week. It was estimated that within three weeks from the 1st March the Japanese could have a combined task force of at least three

¹ W. S. Marchant, CMG, OBE. (With Royal Sussex Regt in France 1915-18.) Resident Commnr, Brit Solomons Is Protectorate, 1939-43; Chief Native Commnr, Kenya Colony, 1943-47. B. 10 Dec 1894. Died 1 Feb 1953.

divisions ready for attack on Australia's north-west coast; and that the enemy air force available for use in the South-West Pacific Area was of 500 to 600 aircraft. North-eastern Australia was in serious danger of attack from Japanese forces concentrating in the Bismarck Archipelago,



Indian Ocean. Movements early March 1942

and it was apprehended that the enemy would attempt the occupation of Port Moresby or the southern Solomons, and possibly attack north-east Australia, or as an alternative would occupy the New Hebrides, with New Caledonia and the severance of Australia's trans-Pacific lines of communication as the eventual objective. To meet these threats were the sparse and depleted Allied naval forces; and in Australia itself air forces of three fighter squadrons, two dive bomber squadrons and one heavy bomber squadron under training; and ground forces of approximately one reinforced brigade in the Port Moresby area; an infantry brigade reinforced with two light regiments of field artillery in the Darwin and north-west area; and approximately one division in the north-east area, Queensland.

The substance of this report was embodied in a cablegram to Mr Churchill,² to be communicated by him to Mr Roosevelt. It emphasised the dangers now confronting Australia and New Zealand, and the immediate threat to Darwin, Port Moresby, New Caledonia and Fiji; and stressed that the urgent problem was the safeguarding of trans-Pacific lines of communication and the prevention of any further southward move by the enemy; and pointed out that the basis of Allied planning in the Pacific must be not only to ensure the security of Australia and New Zealand, but to use them as areas from which to launch offensive action.

² The cablegram was prepared by a drafting committee consisting of Messrs Curtin, Evatt, and Menzies representing Australia; and, for New Zealand, Messrs D. G. Sullivan and J. G. Coates, both members of the Dominion's War Cabinet.

The cablegram expressed agreement with a proposal by the British Chiefs of Staff to include the mainland of Australia in the Anzac Area, but amplified this by proposing a further extension to embrace the mainlands and territories of Australia and New Zealand "and the islands within the boundaries of the existing Anzac Area to the extent not already covered"; an area to the west and north including Timor, Ambon, the whole of New Guinea; and a sea area west of Australia to be determined; and the sea area south of Australia. It would be necessary to provide additional naval forces to meet the additional naval commitment. The cablegram also proposed the establishment in Washington, under the chairmanship of the President of the United States, of a "U.S.-U.K.-Anzac Council", comprising representatives of the four governments concerned; the general strategic supervision of the Anzac Area by the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee, Washington, with naval, military, and air force representatives of Australia and New Zealand added; and the appointment of a Supreme Commander of the area, preferably a United States officer, who would be subject to the general strategical direction of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and have under him a naval commander of all naval forces in the area, and army and air commanders for (a) Australia, its territories and New Caledonia; and (b) New Zealand, Fiji, and islands in their vicinity.

On the immediate naval side, the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board, early in March, asked Vice-Admiral Glassford (whose headquarters as Commander-in-Chief, South-West Pacific, were now Fremantle, with his ships based there) to operate a portion of his submarine force off Darwin in anticipation of an enemy assault on that port not later than early April. This he agreed to do. The Naval Board also told the British Admiralty Delegation, Washington, of the views of the Australian Chiefs of Staff regarding the imminence of a Japanese thrust to Port Moresby, New Caledonia, and the east coast of Australia; and asked that these views be passed on to the Combined Chiefs of Staff "so that adequate naval reinforcements might be provided at once". On 11th March, Admiral Royle outlined to the Advisory War Council his proposals for Allied naval offensive action against Japan. He suggested the formation of an Allied force of nine aircraft carriers (six United States, three British); twelve to fifteen 8-inch cruisers; eighteen to twenty-four destroyers; and nine fast tankers, to form a mobile sea aerodrome containing 400 to 500 aircraft and capable of challenging any force that the Japanese could bring against it. It could be divided into three self-contained tactical units, each of which would operate in its own theatre until the time for concentration arrived. "Some weakening of the protection of Ceylon and important sea communications in the Indian Ocean," said Royle, "would be involved, but this should be accepted in view of the ultimate advantage gained by aggressive action against Japan, which would draw off the Japanese forces that are now available for further attacks." This proposal was passed to London and Washington on 19th March.

It was natural that to the Australian Government and Chiefs of Staff the pressing and serious threat to Australia should emerge from the background of the war as a whole with an urgency and magnitude that tended to distort Australian perspective and obscure from Australian apprehension threats of even greater portent. At this juncture, though the Allied potential was greater by far than that of the enemy, Allied fortunes were at a low ebb on most of the fronts, and the Far Eastern scene, though dark, was not the darkest.

Previous to America's entry into the war, Hitler had prohibited German submarine operations against American ships in the western Atlantic. But on the 12th December 1941—the day after Germany declared war on the United States—the decision was reached at a conference between Hitler and Raeder to carry out such operations. By the end of 1941 the Germans had nearly 100 submarines operational out of a fleet of just on 250, and Allied and neutral losses in the vital battle of the Atlantic rose sharply and dangerously. Forty-six ships totalling 270,348 tons were sunk by submarine attack in Atlantic and Arctic areas in January 1942; 72 of 427,733 tons in February; and 88 of 507,502 tons in March. In all, in the first six months of 1942, the sinkings of British and Allied ships were nearly as heavy as for the whole of 1941, and exceeded the whole Allied shipbuilding program by nearly 3,000,000 tons. It was a situation which, as Churchill later recorded,³ “almost brought us to the disaster of an indefinite prolongation of the war”. In the Mediterranean, the dominating influence of the war at sea on operations on land was illustrated in the fortunes of the Eighth Army. The year 1941 closed with Britain's naval forces in the Mediterranean at their lowest strength, the fateful reduction being on 19th December, when Malta's Force “K” suffered crippling losses, and the battleships *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant* were sunk at their buoys in Alexandria harbour by Italian “human torpedoes”. These calamities enabled the enemy to get valuable convoys across safely to Tripoli at a crucial time when replenishment of Rommel's armies in North Africa could decide the immediate issue there. The loss of the two battleships prevented British fleet operations in the Central Mediterranean; made more difficult the protection and nourishment of Malta; and eased the enemy's problem of supply by removing comparable opposition to the heavy forces with which he now escorted his convoys. Force “K”, whose cruisers were reduced from four to one—*Penelope*—remained at Malta but, weakened as it was, was further handicapped by lack of efficient aerial reconnaissance; for at the beginning of January 1942 Malta had only one aircraft fit for that duty. Furthermore the position of Malta itself was made more hazardous by the increased air attacks on it consequent upon the transfer to the Central Mediterranean area from Russia of Field Marshal Kesselring's Air Fleet. Air attacks on the island rose from 75 in November 1941 to 175 in December, and to 275 and 230 respectively in January and February 1942, mostly delivered against the aerodromes

³ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol IV (1951), p. 96.

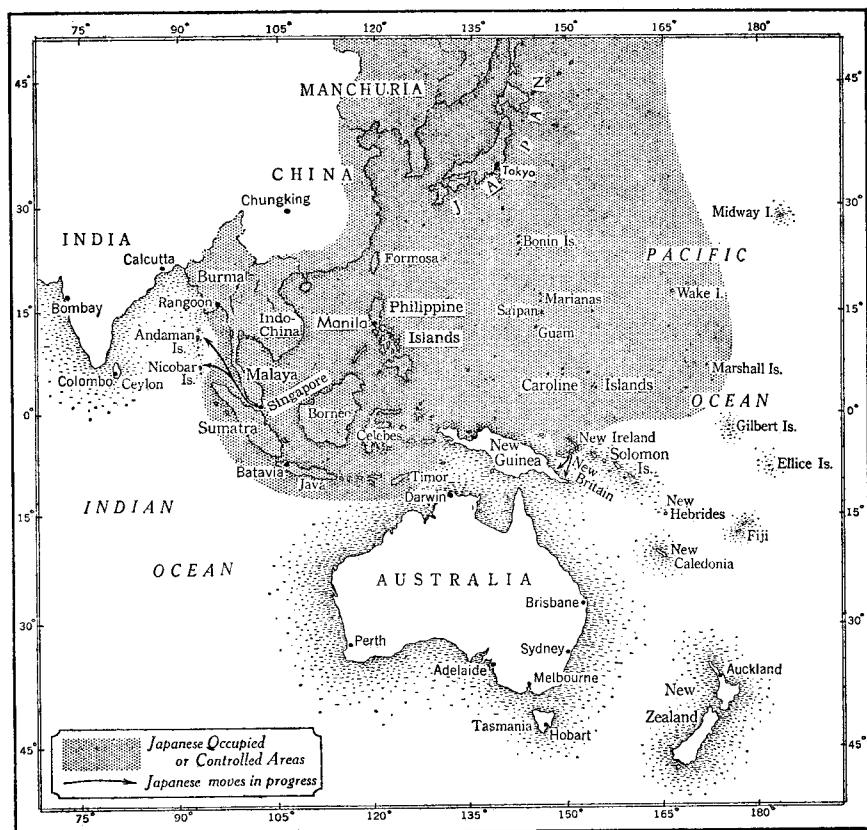
and Grand Harbour. The adverse results were immediate, for British success or otherwise in dealing with the Axis supply line across the Mediterranean varied in almost direct proportion to the amount that their naval and air forces could be based on Malta; and, by and large, success in the land battle in the Western Desert went to that side which could build up the biggest supplies of equipment and stores.

As stated earlier in this volume the Eighth Army, on the morning of 18th November 1941, launched its attack to drive the enemy out of Libya. At first all went well. Tobruk was relieved on 8th December, Derna was captured on the 19th, and Benghazi on the 24th. But meanwhile the December Axis convoy got through to Tripoli; and in the first week in January the enemy successfully ran another of nine large merchant ships into the North African port. On 21st January Rommel, refreshed by the supplies now reaching him freely, launched a reconnaissance in force which rapidly developed into a major advance. The British withdrew from Benghazi on the 28th January and from Derna on 1st February, and fell back to the area Gazala-Tobruk-Bir Hacheim, where they occupied a defensive position. This left the Cyrenaican hump—the Derna-Benghazi area—again in enemy hands, and enabled him to dominate with air power the Central Mediterranean and add to the hazards of nourishing Malta. In mid-February an attempt to run a convoy of three merchant ships to the island from Alexandria failed with the disablement of one of them and the sinking of the other two—all as a result of air attack. The Mediterranean, from the Allied viewpoint, entered upon its bleakest period in the war.

This situation in the Central Mediterranean and Western Desert affected the security of Egypt and the Middle East generally; and a further complication existed in the possibility of Vichy-controlled Madagascar falling into Japanese hands as a sequel to their successes on the eastern shores of the Indian Ocean. It was a possibility described by Churchill as being at this period “a haunting fear”. It was one that lay heavily on the mind of Smuts in South Africa, who on 12th February told Churchill that he regarded Madagascar as “the key to the safety of the Indian Ocean, and it may play the same important part in endangering our security there that Indo-China has played in Vichy and Japanese hands. All our communications with our various war fronts and the Empire in the East may be involved.” Churchill had raised the matter with President Roosevelt five days before hearing from Smuts, as a result of learning of pending talks between the United States and Vichy; and had expressed the hope that no guarantees for the non-occupation of Madagascar by the Allies would be given to the Vichy Government. On this point the President was able to reassure him.

A Japanese cruiser or submarine base in Madagascar would not only threaten the stream of Middle East convoys round the Cape, but would imperil Britain's communications with India and the Persian Gulf; and could lead to the junction in the Indian Ocean of Germans and Japanese. Such a situation was fraught with far reaching dangers. The Allies would

lose the Persian Gulf oil supplies while Germany got all she required; the important southern supply route to the Russians—on whose success in withstanding the impending German spring assault depended the whole of the Levant-Caspian front—would be harried and possibly cut; Turkey would be isolated; Germans would have access to the Black Sea; and



The Far Eastern Scene, beginning of March 1942

Germany and Japan would be free to exchange needed war materials. In guarding against such an eventuality, the British regarded Ceylon as the vital point now that Singapore had gone, and early in March Churchill told Roosevelt: "the next fortnight will be the most critical for Ceylon, and by the end of March we ought to be solidly established there, though by no means entirely secure." In these circumstances it is understandable that Churchill, while admiring the offensive spirit of the Australian memorandum of the 19th March embodying Royle's suggestion for Allied naval action against Japan, could not at that juncture commit any part of the British Eastern Fleet to a participation such as Royle proposed. Replying to the Australian memorandum on the 20th March he said:

It would not be possible for us, as you suggest, to uncover the whole of our sea communications with the Middle East, on which the life of the considerable armies fighting there depends. Neither would it be possible for us to neglect the security of Ceylon . . . or to deprive ourselves of the means of reinforcing or defending India. The dispatch to the Pacific of three out of four of our fast armoured aircraft carriers would leave any battleships we have placed or may place in the Indian Ocean entirely unprotected from air attack, and consequently unable to operate. This would expose all our convoys to the Middle East and India, averaging nearly fifty thousand men a month, to destruction at the hands of two or three fast Japanese cruisers or battle cruisers supported by, perhaps, a single aircraft carrier.⁴

Finally there was, apart from the geographical areas in which the Allies had much to watch and guard against, what Churchill described as "an awful sphere" holding an intimidating danger, and one which made it essential to regard Germany as the foe whose defeat must be the first and main object. By the year 1939 the possibility of the release of energy by atomic fission was visualised among scientists of many nations. By the summer of 1941, a committee of leading British scientists reported that there was a reasonable chance of producing an atomic bomb before the end of the war. Later that year it was arranged for joint British-American research to be carried out in the United States; and the urgency of the problem was underlined by the knowledge that Germany was also pursuing research into the subject.

In London and Washington, therefore, the Australian situation was viewed in a different perspective from that seen through Australian eyes; and particularly so since neither Churchill nor Roosevelt regarded full-scale Japanese invasions of Australia—or of India—as likely.

IV

In the meantime the above mentioned possibilities were as clearly seen by the enemy as they were by the Allies. But whereas the British and Americans (who, despite superficial rivalries and jealousies were bound by a common origin, common ideals and a common tongue) shared a common objective toward the attainment of which they brought a very large measure of mutual confidence and trust, the Axis partners were not mutually fortified in like manner. Their rivalries and jealousies (especially as between the two Western partners and Japan) were deep seated and their relationship as Allies was one of exigency. Furthermore—and this particularly so far as Japan was concerned—their war objectives were individually seen and pursued; and were so pursued without a joint supreme command seized with the paramount importance of sea communications in a world war.

Their respective naval commands were aware of the vital part sea communications would play in the outcome of the war, but only the

⁴ The situation was comprehended by the American Chief of Naval Operations. In a message of the 1st April 1942 to Mr Curtin, Dr Evatt, then in Washington, said: "Admiral King is impressed with Sir Guy Royle's analysis of the naval position regarded as an ultimate objective. In the meantime he is being asked by the British Admiralty to strike against Japan on the Pacific side as often as he can. He tells me that he proposes to do this in order to relieve pressure on the Indian Ocean. While fleets are separated for the time being, he repeats that this is quite consistent with Royle's emphasis on the ultimate concentration of a great force to seek battle with the enemy fleet anywhere."

German viewed the problem on a world scale. The Italian naval outlook was limited to the Mediterranean; the Japanese naval vision ranged more widely, but it too was circumscribed by a defensive policy: to hold the Western Pacific.

The success of the submarine campaign in the first six months of 1942 impressed the German Naval Staff with the importance of this weapon and the use to which it was put. On 13th April,⁵ Hitler agreed with Raeder "that victory depends on destroying the greatest amount of Allied tonnage possible. Thus all offensive operations of the enemy can be slowed down or even stopped entirely"; and Raeder took the opportunity of pressing for an increased quota of raw materials for the building of submarines, and voiced the Naval Staff's opinion that additional copper could be obtained through "buying on the black market in unoccupied France, collecting scrap metal, salvaging copper from the Maginot Line, melting church bells, running the blockade, etc." Hitler, however, failed to exploit to the full the existing opportunities of attacking Allied sea communications by submarine and surface ships. He was pressed by his other service chiefs for labour and materials; and was, moreover, himself convinced that Norway was the "zone of destiny" in the war, and as early as January had demanded "that *every available vessel* be employed in Norway. He endorses our plans to use battleships, pocket battleships, heavy cruisers, light naval forces and P.T. boats; increases his demand for submarines." Thus, Churchill wrote later, Hitler "sacrificed the glittering chances in the Atlantic".⁶

Raeder (who would seem to emerge as Germany's soundest strategist on the world-war scale) while pressing for German action against Allied sea communications, urged also that the Japanese should be persuaded to add their efforts in this direction. Apparently he believed that they were eager to establish a junction with German forces in the Middle East; and on 13th February 1942 he told Hitler:

Rangoon, Singapore, and, most likely, also Port Darwin will be in Japanese hands within a few weeks. Only weak resistance is expected on Sumatra, while Java will be able to hold out longer. Japan plans to protect this front in the Indian Ocean by capturing the key position of Ceylon, and she also plans to gain control of the sea in that area by means of superior naval forces. . . . The Suez and Basra positions are the western pillars of the British position in the Indian area. Should these positions collapse under the weight of concerted Axis pressure, the consequences for the British Empire would be disastrous. An early German-Italian attack on the British key position of Suez would therefore be of utmost strategic importance. Such an undertaking, if successful, would completely solve all our Mediterranean problems; it would have far-reaching effects on such matters as the Mosul oil fields, the attitude of Turkey, the Near East, the Arabian and Indian nationalist movements, the Eastern Front, and the Caucasus. According to reports available, the British themselves are fully aware of the great danger which is threatening them in Egypt. They fear that the German-Italian forces might establish

⁵ *Fuehrer Naval Conferences*, 1942.

⁶ *The Second World War*, Vol IV, p. 97.

contact with the Japanese. The Japanese, on their part, are making an honest effort to establish contact with Germany by sea and by air since they realise the decisive significance this would have on the outcome of the war.

He returned to the subject on 14th March when he told Hitler:

The Japanese have recognised the strategic importance of Madagascar for naval warfare. According to reports submitted, they are planning to establish bases on Madagascar in addition to Ceylon, in order to be able to cripple sea traffic in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. From there they could likewise successfully attack shipping around the Cape. Before establishing these bases, Japan will have to get German consent. For military reasons such consent ought to be granted.

There were, however, political aspects touching "on the basic question of France's relation to the Tripartite Powers on the one hand, and the Anglo-Saxons on the other". Hitler felt that France would not give her consent to a Japanese occupation of Madagascar.

Again, on 13th April, Raeder urged upon Hitler the importance of the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean, and the necessity for Axis occupation of Malta, which

will never again be as weak as it is right now. . . . An early attack against Suez (this year) would have excellent chances of success. It could very well decide the war. . . . *It is therefore imperative to take Malta as soon as possible and to launch an offensive against the Suez Canal not later than 1942.*

He once more emphasised the desirability of Japanese help in the Indian Ocean in attacks on Allied sea communications:

Strong Japanese attacks on the enemy's supply lines in the Indian Ocean could have a decisive effect on our land offensives both in Africa and in Russia. Considering the long period of time necessary before such measures against shipping on the part of the Japanese can be started and can begin to be effective, we must use every means to persuade them to begin operations in the Indian Ocean at the earliest possible date.

In the current conferences with the Japanese Liaison Staff about the situation of naval warfare, the Naval Staff has reminded Admiral Nomura constantly how necessary it is that the Japanese Navy operate soon and decisively in the northern part of the Indian Ocean. The Japanese indicated time and again in the conferences that Japan is willing to harass supply lines to India in her own interest, and that she also intends to operate in the western part of the Indian Ocean with several submarines and two auxiliary cruisers, possibly in May, but that Japan's decisions are greatly handicapped by uncertainty about German plans for future operations. Japan feels that strong attacks against the British supply lines to the Arabian Sea are justified *only* if Germany really has the intention of advancing against the British positions in the Near East and the Middle East. The Japanese representatives speak of the necessity for an offensive by Germany and Italy against the Caucasus-Suez area simultaneously with Japanese operations in the Western Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea.

Raeder urged that the Japanese should be officially informed that strong attacks by the Japanese Navy and Naval Air Force against British supply lines in the western part of the Indian Ocean would give decisive support to the German operations intended for the early summer of 1942. Hitler replied that he had already given the Japanese Ambassador (Oshima) some general indications of the coming spring offensive.

It is debatable how far Raeder was justified in his belief that the Japanese were making an honest effort to establish contact with Germany by sea and by air. They were aware of their limitations, and, as stated above, counted on a short war and planned to secure a negotiated peace by making themselves secure in their area of conquest. They had completed the first of three stages. This division of the war was

always in the minds of the Navy General Staff from earlier years. The first phase operation was the occupation of the raw materials area to the south. The second phase was after the change from offensive in taking this area to the defensive of the occupied area . . . the period of stabilisation of the occupied area immediately after occupation and prior to the beginning of the defensive operations. So the actual order became: first phase—occupation; second phase—stabilisation; third phase—defensive.⁷

But their easy successes induced an over-confidence which now led them into the error of planning an expansion of their outer defence perimeter to what proved to be, for them, a disastrous extent.

According to Commander Masatake Okumiya (who was on the Japanese Imperial Navy Staff)⁸ the fall of Singapore was already taken for granted by the Japanese in January 1942, when there were three alternative plans for the second stage of Japanese strategy. Admiral Yamamoto favoured an attack on Midway and Hawaii, and a decisive meeting with the "remnants" of the United States fleet. Japanese Imperial Headquarters favoured a southerly advance through the Solomons to Samoa, and the blockade and raiding of the Australian coast. Hitler urged a Japanese westerly advance through the Indian Ocean to the Middle East, to join hands with the Germans. This proposal, said Okumiya, was "rejected contemptuously by Yamamoto and respectfully by Imperial Headquarters". As to Japanese invasions of Australasia and India, the Japanese Prime Minister, Tojo, in the last interview he gave before his execution on 23rd December 1948, insisted that Japan had no plans for the physical invasion of Australia or New Zealand. In a statement⁹ he said in reply to a specific question regarding any contemplated invasion of New Zealand and Australia:

We never had enough troops to do so. We had already far out-stretched our lines of communication. We did not have the armed strength or the supply facilities to mount such a terrific extension of our already over-strained and too thinly spread forces. We expected to occupy all New Guinea, to maintain Rabaul as a holding base, and to raid Northern Australia by air. But actual physical invasion—no, at no time.

As to India, the Italian Foreign Minister, Ciano, recorded on 15th March 1942 a report from the Italian Ambassador to Japan, Mario Indelli, who said the Japanese, in a conference with him, had defined their plans:

⁷ Vice-Admiral Fukudome, Chief of Staff of the Combined Fleet. Quoted by J. B. Cohen, *Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction* (1949), p. 51.

⁸ In an interview with Australian journalist, Richard Hughes, at Tokyo, 10 May 1950.

⁹ Typed copies of this statement were submitted to him and his defending solicitor, an American, Mr George Blewett, and approved by them both.

No attack on India, which would disperse their forces in a field that is too vast and unknown; no attack on Russia; an extension of the conflict towards Australia, where it is evident that the Americans and English are preparing a counter-attack.¹

V

Churchill in England and Roosevelt in the United States had a more accurate, comprehensive, and comprehending view of the world war situation than that possessed by the enemies' High Commands. And, furthermore, they were completely united in their views. This had its reflection in the resulting cooperation between the Allied Nations. In early March 1942, one of the most fruitful products of that cooperation came into being with the establishment of "BUSRA"—the British-U.S. Routeing Agreement—by which the world-wide routeing of shipping was jointly controlled. BUSRA was a vast and complex organisation under which the British naval authorities controlled shipping in British home waters, the eastern section of the North and South Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The United States naval authorities controlled shipping in the West Atlantic and the Pacific areas—including the South-West Pacific. Each authority issued routes from the ports of departure in its own strategic areas to the first port of arrival in the other's strategic areas when these were involved. "BUSRA" arose from the understanding shared by the High Command of both the main Allies of the fact at this time expressed by Churchill in a message to Roosevelt discussing the future of the war: "Everything however turns upon shipping."

So far as shipping was concerned there were two main aspects affecting Britain—troop movements; and maintaining the flow of imports into the home islands, and supplies to Russia and to Britain's armies in the East. During the four months February to May inclusive, 1942, it was desired to transport 295,000 men from Britain to the Middle East, India, and Ceylon (at that time, February-March, there were two Australian divisions at sea in the Indian Ocean, at first destined for the Netherlands East Indies from the Middle East, but later sent partly to Australia and partly to Ceylon), and British resources in man-lift shipping were inadequate to this demand. In the other field, the call for cargo space for Russia and the Far East seriously affected import capacity into Britain; and on 4th March Churchill turned to Roosevelt for assistance with American ships. He suggested that it would be most helpful if America could offer New Zealand and Australia the support of two American divisions as an alternative to their recalling their own remaining divisions from the Middle East. Churchill said:

One sympathises with the natural anxiety of Australia and New Zealand when their best troops are out of the country, but shipping will be saved and safety gained by the American reinforcement of Australia and New Zealand rather than by a move across the oceans of these divisions from the Middle East. . . . Finally, it seems of the utmost importance that the United States main naval forces should give

¹ *The Ciano Diaries*, 15 March 1942.

increasing protection in the Anzac area, because this alone can meet the legitimate anxieties of the Governments there and ensure the maintenance of our vital bases of re-entry.

In a reply three days later, Roosevelt agreed to furnish ships for British Middle East convoys, and further said that if the two Australian and New Zealand divisions were left by their Governments in the Middle East and available for India, the United States was prepared to send two divisions, one to Australia and one to New Zealand, in addition to the two already under orders for Australia and New Caledonia, making a total of 90,000 American troops in Australasia. All was dependent upon leaving the two Anzac divisions in the Middle East; in no other way could the shipping be put to the highest use. This was done, and contributed to the development of Anglo-American strategy, the course of which was governed by the availability of shipping.² For, as Churchill later said, shipping was at once "the stranglehold and sole foundation of our war strategy".

On the day that the establishment of BUSRA was announced from Washington, the 8th March 1942, Roosevelt made far-reaching proposals to Churchill regarding the division into geographical areas of American-British operational responsibility for the future conduct of the war. He suggested that the whole of the operational responsibility for the Pacific area should rest on the United States. Operating decisions for the area as a whole would be made by the U.S. Chiefs of Staff in Washington, where would be an Advisory Council on operational matters, with members from Australia, New Zealand, Netherlands East Indies and China, with an American presiding. Supreme command in the area would be American, with local operating commands held by the nationals concerned. Roosevelt wrote:

Under such an arrangement decisions for immediate operating strategy would be determined in Washington and by an American Supreme Commander for the whole Pacific area under the supervision of United States Chiefs of Staff. The methods of regaining the offensive would be similarly decided. This would include, for example, offensives in a north-westerly direction from the main southern bases and attacks on Japan proper from Chinese or Aleutian or Siberian bases. There would be definite responsibility on our part, thus relieving British from any tasks in this area other than supplementing our efforts with material where possible.

Mr Roosevelt went on to say that the middle area, extending from Singapore to and including India and the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Libya and the Mediterranean, would fall directly under British responsibility.

All operating matters in this area would be decided by you; but always with the understanding that as much assistance would be given to India or Near East by Australia and New Zealand as could be worked out with their Governments.

² In March 1942, British total man-lift was 280,000 men. On the 8th of the month Roosevelt told Churchill: "We now have under construction troopships that will carry 225,250 men. It is understood that the British do not plan to increase their total of troop-carrying ships. Shipping now available under the US flag will lift a total of about 130,000 men. Increases from conversions during 1942 are estimated at at least 35,000 men. By June 1943 new construction will give an additional 40,000, by December 1943 an additional 100,000, and by June 1944 an additional 95,000. Thus, neglecting losses, the total troop-carrying capacity of US vessels by June 1944 will be 400,000 men."

The European and Atlantic theatres would remain a joint United States and British responsibility. All possible aid would be given to Russia.

On 17th March the Australian Prime Minister told the War Cabinet that President Roosevelt had expressed general agreement with the Australian and New Zealand proposals regarding the Anzac Area "except as to some details concerning relationship to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and boundaries". Mr Curtin also reported that General Douglas MacArthur had that day arrived in Australia from the Philippines, and in accordance with his directions had assumed command of all United States forces in the Commonwealth; and that the President had intimated that

should it be in accord with the wishes of the Government and people of Australia it would be highly acceptable to him and pleasing to the American people for the Australian Government to nominate General MacArthur as the Supreme Commander of all Allied Forces in the South-West Pacific.

The Australian Government—and the people generally—were agreeable, and on 18th March a statement announcing MacArthur's appointment as Supreme Commander was released by Mr Curtin.

On 24th March, the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington recommended the adoption of the principles of President Roosevelt's proposal regarding the allocation of areas of operational responsibility. Next day the Australian Minister for External Affairs, Dr Evatt, then in Washington, cabled to Mr Curtin giving him the outline of the recommendations of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, including that of the subdivision of the Pacific area into two operational theatres, the South-West Pacific Area under General MacArthur; and the Southern Pacific Area, directly under Washington, "i.e., in effect under Admiral King". This subdivision meant that Australia and New Zealand would be separated, Australia in the South-West Pacific Area and New Zealand in the South Pacific; and on 26th March the New Zealand Government expressed to the Australian its objections to this proposed separation, and suggested that if the Australian Government agreed with them it might support that of New Zealand in a protest to Washington. The main point of the New Zealand objection was that Australia and New Zealand were one strategical whole in which already substantial military and economic cooperation had been achieved.³ If the recently agreed upon Anzac Area were retained under an Anzac commander subordinate to the Supreme Commander of the whole Pacific area, New Zealand had no objection, but

if an Anzac Area is not to be created, then we consider it essential that there should be no separation between Australia and New Zealand which should continue to be regarded as integral parts of one area for purposes of offence and defence. This could, no doubt, be effectively achieved if the Supreme Commander of the Pacific were located in Australia. If, however, he were not so located or ceased

³ The American view, however, which had sound strategic grounds, was that Australia and New Zealand were distinct strategic entities. Australia was menaced by enemy troops in the Bismarcks and New Guinea so that defence was a land-air task for which the best naval support was a fleet free to manoeuvre without restrictions imposed by the local situation. New Zealand, on the other hand, could not be threatened so long as the Allied navies controlled the sea approaches, and its defence was primarily a naval task. (See Morison, *History of Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol IV, p. 250.)

to be so for any lengthy period, then we think that a separate commander (located in Australia or New Zealand) of the whole Anzac Areas proposed, including both Australia and New Zealand, becomes essential.

With this view the Australian Chiefs of Staff agreed, with the additional consideration that

It is essential to Australia that New Zealand, Fiji and New Caledonia should be in the same area as Australia, because they are all interdependent and from every point of view must be considered together. Australia's line of communications with the United States is through New Zealand, Fiji and New Caledonia, and the most effective and economic use of the forces available to defend the whole area depends upon there being unity of command so that the speedy reinforcement of any points threatened can be effected as necessary.

The Australian Chiefs of Staff, while adhering to the proposals for the creation of an Anzac Area "rather than what is now proposed from Washington", also suggested that all the naval forces in the Pacific should be put directly under the command of the United States Chiefs of Staff "with a view to ensuring the greatest concentration of naval forces at the right place and time. This, of course, would involve Admiral Glassford's force (comprising Fremantle) being placed under the command of Admiral Leary."

These views were pressed in Washington by Dr Evatt for Australia and Mr Nash for New Zealand. But on 1st April Dr Evatt told Mr Curtin that it was not possible, at any rate for the time, to alter the areas of command assigned to General MacArthur on the one hand (South-West Pacific) and to the American naval commander (South Pacific) on the other; but it had been emphasised that separation of the areas did not in any way mean the absence of joint planning and coordination between those concerned. "I am," said Dr Evatt, "in close cooperation with Nash on this question and we think it probable that before long even paper separation of the areas will disappear." On 5th and 7th April 1942 respectively, the New Zealand and Australian Governments, in cablegrams to Washington, expressed formal approval of the establishment of the South-West Pacific and South Pacific Areas.⁴

Britain, at this period, had one more word to say on the subject of division of operational responsibility, so far as it affected her own feeling of responsibility regarding the defence of Australia. On 24th March, the day the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington recommended adoption of Roosevelt's proposals, the Australian Advisory War Council discussed a message from Churchill which, received a week earlier, gave the text

⁴ The original boundaries of the areas were: South-West Pacific Area: on the west from Cape Kami in the Luichow Peninsula around the coast of the Tonkin Gulf, Indo-China, Thailand, and Malaya to Singapore; from Singapore south to the north coast of Sumatra; thence round the east coast of Sumatra (leaving the Sunda Strait to the eastward of the line) to a point on the coast of Sumatra at longitude 104° east; thence south to latitude 08° south; thence south-easterly towards Onslow, Australia, and on reaching longitude 110° east due south along that meridian. On the north and east from Cape Kami in the Luichow Peninsula south to latitude 20° north; thence east to longitude 130° east; thence south to the equator; thence east to longitude 165° east; thence to latitude 10° south; thence west to latitude 17° south longitude 160° east; thence south. The South Pacific Area was all that area south of the equator extending eastward from the eastern boundary of the South-West Pacific Area to longitude 110° west.

of his reply to the President's suggestions, and reiterated former guarantees of British support to Australia in a crisis. Churchill wrote:

I wish here and now, however, to make the following plain to you. The fact that an American commander will be in charge of all the operations in the Pacific Area will not be regarded by His Majesty's Government as in any way absolving them from their determination and duty to stand to your aid to the best of their ability, and if you are actually invaded in force, which has by no means come to pass and may never come to pass, we shall do our utmost to divert British troops and British ships rounding the Cape, or already in the Indian Ocean, to your succour, albeit at the expense of India and the Middle East.

Thus, with the successes of the Tripartite Powers in the West and the East, the war, in March 1942, entered on the threshold of a new phase. Since its outbreak in September 1939, the task of the British peoples and their allies had been to hold on as strongly as possible against assaults, delivered with the full weight of accumulated military forces and equipment, by war machines geared by long preparation to top performance. It had been a taxing and difficult task, and one in which big concessions had often had to be made to superior strength in local theatres. But the main strongposts still held firm though sorely beset—the British home islands; Egypt, and with it the Middle East; West, South, and East Africa; Ceylon; India; Australia; New Zealand; and the American continent at the junction of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. They were all keypoints on those world-wide seaborne communications on whose control the outcome of the war depended, all sources of growing strength in manpower and materials of war, or points of re-entry into territories temporarily overrun by the enemy; strung on the sea routes along which that growing strength of the Allies would presently flow in an increasing flood.

That flow would take time to develop. American production—vast beyond the estimation of the Axis leaders—was only beginning to get into its swiftly mounting swing and, as Churchill told Roosevelt, would only become effective gradually because of the great distances and the shortage of ships. These disabilities would be overcome, but “meanwhile there are many hard forfeits to pay”. By May, Britain's Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean would be of three modern armoured aircraft carriers, six battleships, four modern and some older cruisers, and twenty or so destroyers. In the Pacific, American naval strength was resurgent towards an unmatched superiority; and American shipbuilding, of mercantile as well as of naval tonnage, was rising to unprecedented heights—by May 1942 they were to balance their current merchant losses with new ships.

“There is no use giving a single further thought to Singapore or the Dutch Indies,” Roosevelt wrote to Churchill on 18th March. “They are gone. Australia must be held, and we are willing to undertake that. . . . You must hold Egypt, the Canal, Syria, Iran, and the route to the Caucasus.” But it was not all to be holding. Allied plans were in the making for forward and decisive moves against Japan in the East, and against the Western enemies in North Africa and on the Continent of Europe; and in these plans the greatest accretion of strength to the Allied

cause lay in the unity of the Allies—unity of understanding, unity of goal, unity of strategy, and unity of command with all that went with it in training, supply, and in tactics. The fumbling period of ABDA was over; the period of positive and united participation had begun.

In this new period (whose story so far as the Australian Navy was concerned will be told in the succeeding volume to this) Australia and the Royal Australian Navy played an active and prominent part, comparable with that they had played in the first phase of the conflict. The Navy had entered that first phase in September 1939, small in numbers of ships and of men, with little more than the tradition of actual sea battle, but well trained and efficient. They emerged from that phase the poorer in the loss of fine ships and men, but rich in knowledge of their task and of themselves; proved in the fire of actual experience of war at sea; and stronger in numbers both of ships newly built and men newly trained to man them. They were assets which would stand both Navy and Nation in good part on the hard road to victory.

APPENDIX 1

SHIPS OF THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY, MAY 1920

Ship	Class	Tonnage	Main Armament	Speed
<i>Australia</i>	Battle Cruiser	19,200	12-inch	25 Knots
<i>Sydney</i>	Light Cruiser	5,400	6-inch	25.5 Knots
<i>Melbourne</i>	Light Cruiser	5,400	6-inch	25.5 Knots
<i>Brisbane</i>	Light Cruiser	5,400	6-inch	25.5 Knots
<i>Encounter</i>	Light Cruiser	5,880	6-inch	20 Knots
<i>Pioneer</i>	Old Cruiser	2,200	4-inch	20.5 Knots
<i>Protector</i>	Gunboat	920	6-inch	14 Knots
<i>Anzac</i>	Flotilla Leader	1,310	4-inch	34 Knots
<i>Tasmania</i>	Destroyer	1,075	4-inch	36 Knots
<i>Swordsman</i>	Destroyer	1,075	4-inch	36 Knots
<i>Success</i>	Destroyer	1,075	4-inch	36 Knots
<i>Stalwart</i>	Destroyer	1,075	4-inch	36 Knots
<i>Tattoo</i>	Destroyer	1,075	4-inch	36 Knots
<i>Parramatta</i>	Destroyer	700	4-inch	26 Knots
<i>Yarra</i>	Destroyer	700	4-inch	26 Knots
<i>Warrego</i>	Destroyer	700	4-inch	26 Knots
<i>Torrens</i>	Destroyer	700	4-inch	26 Knots
<i>Huon</i>	Destroyer	700	4-inch	26 Knots
<i>Swan</i>	Destroyer	700	4-inch	26 Knots
<i>Mallow</i>	Sloop	1,200	12-pdr.	16.5 Knots
<i>Marguerite</i>	Sloop	1,250	4-inch	16.5 Knots
<i>Geranium</i>	Sloop	1,250	4-inch	16.5 Knots
<i>Fantome</i>	Gunboat	1,070	3-pdr.	13 Knots
<i>Countess of Hopetoun</i>	Torpedo Boat	75	—	—
<i>Platypus</i>	Submarine Depot Ship			
	Ship	3,476	4.7-inch	15.5 Knots
<i>Una (ex-Komet)</i>	Sloop	1,438	4-inch	16 Knots
<i>J1</i>	Submarines	1,820	4-inch Gun 18-inch Tubes	19 Knots Surface 9.5 Knots Submerged
<i>J2</i>				
<i>J3</i>				
<i>J4</i>				
<i>J5</i>				
<i>J7</i>				
AUXILIARIES:				
<i>Cerberus</i>	Coast Defence Ship	3,169	10-inch	9 Knots
<i>Penguin</i>	Depot Ship	1,130	90-cwt.	11 Knots
<i>Tingira</i>	Training Ship (ex- <i>Sobraon</i>)	2,131 Register		
<i>Kurumba</i>	Oiler	3,978	—	12 Knots
<i>Franklin</i>	Yacht	—	—	12.5 Knots
BUILDING:				
<i>Adelaide</i>	Light Cruiser	5,100	6-inch	25.5 Knots
<i>Biloela</i>	Collier	5,596 Register	4-inch	11 Knots

APPENDIX 2

FLAG OFFICERS COMMANDING THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVAL SQUADRON, 1919-1945

DUMARESQ, Rear-Admiral John Saumarez, C.B., C.V.O., Australian-born, at Sydney, N.S.W., 26 October 1873. Entered Royal Navy 1886. Commanded H.M.A.S. *Sydney* 1917-19. Commodore Commanding Australian Squadron 22 March 1919-14 June 1921. Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron 14 June 1921-29 April 1922. The first officer of Australian birth to command H.M. Australian Squadron. Died, Manila, Philippine Islands, 22 July 1922.

ADDISON, Admiral Sir Albert Percy, K.B.E., C.B., C.M.G. Born Portsmouth, England, 8 November 1875. Commodore Commanding Australian Squadron 30 June 1922-1 November 1923. Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron 2 November 1923-29 April 1924. Died 13 November 1952.

WARDLE, Vice-Admiral Thomas Erskine, C.B., D.S.O. Born Burton-on-Trent, England, 1877. Entered Royal Navy 1890. Commanded H.M.S. *Alcantara* in action with German S.M.S. *Greif* in first world war. Commodore Commanding Australian Squadron 30 April 1924-30 April 1926. Died 9 May 1944.

HYDE, Admiral Sir George Francis, K.C.B., C.V.O., C.B.E. Born Southsea, Portsmouth, England, 19 July 1877. Entered Royal Navy, transferred to Royal Australian Navy as executive officer, H.M.A.S. *Australia*, 1913-15. Commodore Commanding Australian Squadron 30 April 1926-30 April 1928; Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron 1 May 1928-15 May 1929, Rear-Admiral Commanding 3rd Battle Squadron 1930-31. First Naval Member A.C.N.B., and Chief of Naval Staff, 1931-37. Died 28 July 1937.

EVANS, Admiral Edward Ratcliffe Garth Russell (Lord Mountevans), K.C.B., D.S.O., born London, England, 28 October 1881. Entered Royal Navy (from *Worcester*) 1897. Second-in-Command British Antarctic Expedition 1909-13. Commanded H.M.S. *Broke* 1917 when that ship and H.M.S. *Swift* engaged and defeated six German destroyers in Channel. Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron 17 May 1929-29 May 1931. Commander-in-Chief Africa Station 1933-35; Commander-in-Chief the Nore, 1935-39. London Regional Commissioner for Defence, 1939-45.

HOLBROOK, Rear-Admiral Leonard Stanley, M.V.O. Born England, 1882. Joined Royal Navy 1896. Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron 29 May 1931-6 April 1932.

DALGLISH, Rear-Admiral Robin Campsie, C.B. Australian-born, in Dubbo, N.S.W., 3 December 1880. Joined Royal Navy 1897. Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron 7 April 1932-19 April 1934. Died 18 December 1934.

FORD, Admiral Sir Wilbraham Tennyson Randle, K.C.B., K.B.E. Born Jersey, Channel Islands, 19 January 1880. Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron 19 April 1934-20 April 1936. As Flag Officer-in-Charge, Malta, from 1937 to 1942, he had a good deal to do with Australian destroyers there during 1940-41. As Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, Admiral Cunningham, said of him: "It is no exaggeration to say that he was one of the mainstays of the defence of Malta through one of the most grievous periods of its eventful history."

LANE-POOLE, Vice-Admiral Sir Richard Hayden Owen, K.B.E., C.B. Born England, 1 April 1883. Commanded South American Division 1932-33. Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron 20 April 1936-22 April 1938.

- CUSTANCE, Rear-Admiral Wilfred Neville, C.B. Born South Kensington, London, 25 June 1884. Joined Royal Navy 1899. Commanded H.M.S. *Rodney* 1934-36. Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron 22 April 1938-2 September 1939. Died 13 December 1939.
- PATTERSON, Admiral Sir Wilfrid Rupert, K.C.B., C.V.O., C.B.E. Born Belfast, Northern Ireland, 20 November 1893. Entered Royal Navy 1906. Commanded H.M.A.S. *Canberra* April 1938-June 1940. Commodore Commanding Australian Squadron 2 September 1939-31 October 1939. Reverted to Royal Navy 14 June 1940. Commanded 5th Cruiser Squadron 1945. Died 15 December 1954.
- CRACE, Admiral Sir John Gregory, K.B.E., C.B. Australian-born, Canberra, 6 February 1887. Educated King's School, Parramatta, and H.M.S. *Britannia*. Entered Royal Navy 1902. Torpedo Officer in H.M.A.S. *Australia* first world war. Rear-Admiral August 1939. Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron (and Task Force 44) 1 November 1939-13 June 1942. Admiral Superintendent H. M. Dockyard, Chatham, 1942-46. Admiral (Retd) 1945. Of Longacre, Liss, Hants., England.
- CRUTCHLEY, Admiral Sir Victor Alexander Charles, V.C., K.C.B., D.S.C. Born England, 2 November 1893. Educated Osborne and Portsmouth. In H.M.S. *Vindictive* at blocking of Ostend Harbour, first world war—9-10 May 1918 (V.C.). Commanded H.M.S. *Warspite* 1937-39. Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron (and Task Force 44, later Task Force 74) 13 June 1942-13 June 1944. Reverted to Royal Navy. Flag-Officer Gibraltar and Mediterranean Approaches 1945.
- COLLINS, Vice-Admiral Sir John Augustine, K.B.E., C.B. Australian-born, at Deloraine, Tasmania, 7 January 1899. Educated Christian Brothers College, Melbourne, R.A.N. College. Entered R.A.N. College 31 December 1912. Captain 31 December 1937. Commanding Officer H.M.A.S. *Sydney* 16 November 1939-13 May 1941. Chief of Staff to Commander-in-Chief China, Commodore Commanding British Far Eastern Squadron (temp.) 1941-42. Naval Officer-in-Charge Western Australia 1942. Commanding Officer H.M.A.S. *Shropshire* 1943-44. Commodore Commanding Australian Squadron (and Task Force 74) 13 June 1944-21 October 1944, when seriously wounded in the Battle of Leyte Gulf at the invasion of the Philippines. Naval Officer-in-Charge, Western Australia, 1945, Commodore Commanding Australian Squadron 22 July 1945-9 November 1946. Rear-Admiral January 1947. First Naval Member A.C.N.B. and Chief of Naval Staff February 1948-February 1955. Vice-Admiral 1950. Australian High Commissioner, New Zealand, 1956. Was first graduate of the Naval College to command the Australian Squadron and to become 1st N.M. and C.N.S.
- FARNCOMB, Rear-Admiral Harold Bruce, C.B., D.S.O., M.V.O. Australian-born, at Sydney, N.S.W., 28 February 1899. Entered R.A.N. College 31 December 1912. Captain 30 June 1937. (Was first graduate of R.A.N. College to reach this rank.) Commanding Officer H.M.A.S. *Perth*, June 1939-June 1940, thereafter during war was Commanding Officer of H.M.A. Ships *Canberra* and *Australia*, and H.M.S. *Attacker*. Commodore Commanding Australian Squadron 19 December 1944-21 July 1945, and 7 November 1946-8 January 1947. Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron January 1947-January 1949. Head of Australian Joint Service Staff in U.S.A., 1949-51. Retired from Royal Australian Navy 1951.

APPENDIX 3

ABBREVIATIONS

- AA—*Anti-aircraft.*
 AB—*Able-bodied (seaman).*
 ACH—*Area Combined Headquarters.*
 ACNS—*Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff.*
 Adm—*Admiral.*
 AFC—*Air Force Cross.*
 AFPAC—*Army Forces in the Pacific.*
 AHQ—*Army Headquarters.*
 AIB—*Allied Intelligence Bureau.*
 AIF—*Australian Imperial Force*
 Air Cmdre—*Air Commodore.*
 Anzac—*Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.*
 AOC—*Air Officer Commanding.*
 AOC-in-C—*Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief.*
 Asdic—*Shipborne submarine-detecting apparatus (from Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee).*
 Asst—*Assistant.*
 ATIS—*Allied Translator and Interpreter Section.*
 AVM—*Air Vice-Marshal.*
 Brig—*Brigadier.*
 Capt—*Captain.*
 CB—*Companion of the Order of the Bath.*
 CBE—*Companion of the Order of the British Empire.*
 Cd—*Command.*
 Cdr—*Commander.*
 Cd Gnr—*Commissioned Gunner.*
 CGM—*Conspicuous Gallantry Medal.*
 CGS—*Chief of the General Staff.*
 CH—*Companion of Honour.*
 CIE—*Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire.*
 CIGS—*Chief of the Imperial General Staff.*
 C-in-C—*Commander-in-Chief.*
 Cmdre—*Commodore.*
 CMG—*Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George.*
 CNS—*Chief of Naval Staff.*
 CO—*Commanding Officer.*
 COIC—*Combined Operations and Intelligence Centre.*
 Col—*Colonel.*
 Comd—*Commanded.*
 COS—*Chiefs of Staff.*
 CPO—*Chief Petty Officer.*
 CSI—*Companion of the Order of the Star of India.*
 CVO—*Commander of the Royal Victorian Order.*
 D—*Deputy, Director.*
 DCNS—*Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff.*
 DFC—*Distinguished Flying Cross.*
 DNI—*Director of Naval Intelligence.*
 DSC—*Distinguished Service Cross.*
 DSM—*Distinguished Service Medal.*
 DSO—*Companion of the Distinguished Service Order.*
 DUKW—*Rubber-tyred amphibian, 2½-ton, used for short runs from ship to shore.*
 ED—*Efficiency Decoration.*
 ERA—*Engine Room Artificer.*
 F-Lt—*Flight Lieutenant.*
 GBE—*Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire.*
 GC—*George Cross.*
 GCB—*Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath.*
 GCMG—*Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George.*
 Gen—*General.*
 GHQ—*General Headquarters.*
 GM—*George Medal.*
 Gnr—*Gunner.*
 GOC—*General Officer Commanding.*
 Gp—*Group.*
 Gp Capt—*Group Captain.*
 GSO—*General Staff Officer.*
 HMAS—*His Majesty's Australian Ship.*
 HMS—*His Majesty's Ship.*
 HQ—*Headquarters.*
 i/c—*in charge.*
 IG—*Inspector-General*
 IJN—*Imperial Japanese Navy.*
 in—*inch.*
 Intell—*Intelligence.*
 JCS—*Joint Chiefs of Staff.*

- KBE—*Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire.*
 KCB—*Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath.*
 KCIE—*Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire.*
 KCSI—*Knight Commander of the Star of India.*
 KCVO—*Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order.*
 KG—*Knight of the Order of the Garter.*
 KT—*Knight of the Order of the Thistle.*
 Kts—*Knots.*

 Lat—*Latitude.*
 LCI—*Landing Craft, Infantry.*
 LCM—*Landing Craft, Mechanised.*
 LCS—*Landing Craft, Support.*
 LCT—*Landing Craft, Tank.*
 Ldg—*Leading.*
 LHQ—*Land Headquarters.*
 LO—*Liaison Officer.*
 Long—*Longitude.*
 L of C—*Lines of Communication.*
 LSD—*Landing Ship, Dock.*
 LST—*Landing Ship, Tank.*
 Lt—*Lieutenant.*
 Lt-Cdr—*Lieutenant-Commander.*

 MBE—*Member of the Order of the British Empire.*
 MC—*Military Cross.*
 ME—*Middle East.*
 Medit—*Mediterranean.*
 MG—*Machine-Gun.*
 MHR—*Member of the House of Representatives.*
 ML—*Motor launch.*
 MLA—*Member of Legislative Assembly.*
 MM—*Military Medal.*
 MMS—*Motor Minesweeper.*
 MVO—*Member of the Royal Victorian Order.*

 NCO—*Non-commissioned Officer.*
 NEI—*Netherlands East Indies.*
 NG—*New Guinea.*
 NOIC—*Naval Officer-in-Charge.*
 NT—*Northern Territory.*
 NTO—*Naval Transport Officer.*

 OBE—*Officer of the Order of the British Empire.*
 OC—*Officer Commanding.*
 OD—*Ordinary Seaman.*
 Oftr—*Officer.*
 OM—*Member of the Order of Merit.*
 Ops—*Operations.*

 pdr—*Pounder.*
 Plenaps—*Plans for employment of naval and air forces of associated powers in eastern theatre in event of war with Japan.*
 PO—*Petty Officer.*
 POA—*Pacific Ocean Areas.*
 PW—*Prisoner of War.*

 QM—*Quartermaster.*

 RAAF—*Royal Australian Air Force.*
 Radar—*Radio detection and ranging.*
 RAF—*Royal Air Force.*
 RAN—*Royal Australian Navy.*
 RANR—*Royal Australian Naval Reserve.*
 RANVR—*Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve.*
 RD—*Reserve Officers' Decoration.*
 RDF—*Radio Direction Finding (Radar).*
 Rear-Adm—*Rear-Admiral.*
 Regt—*Regiment.*
 RIN—*Royal Indian Navy.*
 RN—*Royal Navy.*
 RNR—*Royal Naval Reserve.*
 RNVr—*Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.*

 SEAC—*South-East Asia Command.*
 Sgt—*Sergeant.*
 Sig—*Signalman, Signals.*
 SNO—*Senior Naval Officer.*
 SOPAC—*South Pacific Area.*
 Sqn—*Squadron.*
 Sqn Ldr—*Squadron Leader.*
 Stn—*Station.*
 Sub-Lt—*Sub-Lieutenant.*
 SWPA—*South-West Pacific Area.*

 TAF—*Tactical Air Force.*
 TF—*Task Force.*
 TG—*Task Group.*
 Tk—*Tank.*
 torp—*torpedo.*

 USA—*United States of America, United States Army.*
 USAAF—*United States Army Air Force.*
 USN—*United States Navy.*
 USSBS—*United States Strategic Bombing Survey.*

 VC—*Victoria Cross.*
 VD—*Volunteer Officers' Decoration.*
 Vice-Adm—*Vice-Admiral.*
 VRD—*Volunteer Reserve Officers' Decoration.*

 W Cdr—*Wing Commander.*
 W-O—*Warrant Officer.*

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